


AVONDALE
OF
AVONDALE





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AVONDALE

OF

AVONDALE.

A POLITICAL ROMANCE.

IN THREE VOLS.

BY

UTTERE BARRE.

I have a lever, had I fulcrum too,
The earth from dullest sloth should be uplift.

VOL. I.

London:

REMINGTON AND CO.,

5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1877.

TO E. MARJORIBANKS, ESQ., OF 134, PICCADILLY, W.

MY DEAR MARJORIBANKS,

You have been kind enough to read the MS of the following pages, and to express a favourable opinion upon their contents. The book was written, almost entirely, nearly ten years ago, when some of the scenes and events to which it relates were in progress. For various reasons it has lain by. It is now published as it was when written, with scarcely a sentence altered; and I trust that the verdict you have passed upon it may not be reversed or qualified by the larger audience to which it is submitted.

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

UTTERE BARRE.

LONDON,

1st May, 1877.

BOOK I.



WALTER AVONDALE.

WALTER AVONDALE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was the midst of the season, of a season gayer even than London had known for some years. On all sides nought but tokens of wealth and prosperity met the eye. The metropolis was filled with visitors from home and abroad. Splendid equipages crowded the Park, fashionable mobs nightly flocked to reception, ball, and concert, theatre and opera were packed to overflowing. True enough a close observer might have detected blemishes beneath the fair exterior. Of the wealth so ostentatiously displayed not a little came from speculations, nearer akin to gambling or downright fraud than to honest trading. Many branches of employment were in a depressed state, and even in those where work was plentiful there existed the feud, scarcely concealed, which modern legislation keeps alive between employer

and employed, each anxious to grasp the whole profit. And far down in the social strata tossed and seethed that mass of suffering and vice, born of man's selfishness and crimes, which is never absent from a great city, and which, now and again, even in law-abiding, religious England, made its cries of misery, want, and despair heard above the roar of pleasures. But what of that? Wretchedness and care are incidental to humanity, at least to its lower sections. Need those placed by fate above the reach of such mishaps allow useless regrets to embitter their cup of life? Need the sybarite, who has erected his dwelling amid the elms and olives that cluster round the flanks of Vesuvius, and overlooking the Circean bay, trouble himself about the eruption that may not happen in his time?

More than anything else a lively session added an unusual excitement to London life. Death had removed a long-tried statesman from the head of affairs, and the sceptre he had wielded with consummate tact had fallen into younger and rasher hands. Such an event, at all times, is productive of great agitation, and especially so was it now. Phaeton was endeavouring to guide

his father's chariot, but with little success. The steeds were pulling each in a different direction, and mankind were watching their efforts with feelings compounded of contempt and fear, some dreading, more hoping for, all expecting a general catastrophe.

Granstone Street is one of the quietest of those opening into Piccadilly. Here, in chambers, dwelt Walter Avondale, a member of the Inner Temple, with aspirations, however, tending to politics, rather than law. He was a very passable specimen of the average Englishman, about twenty-five, tall, well-made, with the Saxon's blue eye, and the Briton's reddish moustache and whiskers. His face told you that he was an honest man, his finely cut lips that he was a determined one, while his square, high forehead augured well for his abilities and intellect. Just at present something had ruffled his temper, and his countenance wore an expression of both vexation and constitutional melancholy, which occasionally seized him. A slight knock at the door roused him from his meditations.

"Confound it!" was his ejaculation. "Talbot, I suppose, wants to trot me off to the Adelphi to

see the new actress he is in love with—unless it is Tom Lewis, with a cool request for another fiver.”

The appearance of his visitor agreeably dissipated his doubts, and he gladly welcomed him—

“Jardine, my dear fellow, how are you? I thought your people had a grand affair on to-night, and when I heard you outside I fully expected some other less delightful acquaintance.”

“Well, so I believe my mother has, or is to have, a crush this evening. I don’t suppose they have begun to come yet. I must be back there presently; but I heard something at dinner just now which I thought would interest yourself, and I have dropped in to let you know it.”

“Me! What is it? A police magistracy at the diggings, or a consulship in Mexico? Both which, as my head is not proof against lead, nor my intercostal integuments against a well-sharpened poignard, I must respectfully decline.”

“No, nothing of the sort, Avondale. You are too valuable to your friends to be despatched on such an expedition. The fact is, my father has been offered, or partly offered, the Vice-Presidency

of the Colonial Board. You know all about his experience in that line. The Government is rather shaky." ("Very much so," interpolated his listener). "Very much so—in fact, there is an ominous split in it. Wharfedale, Chief Commissioner of the Poor Law Board, and Maitland, of the Home Office, do not agree particularly well. The latter is, as you are aware, the actual head of the Ministry, and, if it comes to a crisis, the Marquis must simply go out into the cold. He is at best but a dummy, his subs do all the work. Magnus Jupiter kept him there out of personal regard, and now that his kingship has gone back to Olympus, Wharfedale has been considerably snubbed. He considers himself, too, quite as important an individual as the Premier. It, therefore, seems very probable that before the end of the week he will resign. His retirement may carry others with him, though I think not—save his own particular following—but, anyhow, Sir George Edmunds is to change from the Emigrants to the Workhouses."

"Edmunds to go to the Poor Law Board! What next, my dear fellow? He is the solitary Liberal who knows anything of the Colonies."

“So it may be, but that, at least, is the present proposal, and, if it be carried out, the Vice-President is to become head of his department, and my father to take the place thereby left vacant.”

“Well narrated, Jardine. I did not think you were such a politician, though it strikes me that you have left out some very important considerations. Why don’t you get a seat somewhere?”

“I? Not while I can run up a good score at Lord’s. But where was I? At the offer made to the governor—this is just the point which has brought me here. If this arrangement is carried out, what say you to being the new Vice-President’s Private Secretary? I believe such an individual is a necessary part of the establishment; and I am sure my father is not acquainted with any one whom he would appoint in preference to yourself. Probably such a post won’t satisfy the cravings of your ambitious mind, but don’t refuse it straight off. It would, at least, give you what you especially desire—an introduction to politics—as well as a species of inchoative claim to something higher in future.”

"I scarcely know what to reply. It is an opening such as I have not ventured to hope for, at least, not for some time. I am extremely obliged to you, Stuart, personally, for your consideration and kindness."

"Never mind about that. If you will accept the offer, it is all the thanks I ever desire. But I don't believe you will long be content with a private secretaryship. Give you an inch, I have no doubt you will soon take an ell."

"Not unlikely, supposing I should see the opportunity for taking the ell; and this opportunity might, in the present state of affairs, easily occur at any moment. We seem on the point of a general smash up, when all sections will become involved in one inextricable muddle, and leaders without followers, parties without chief, will go wandering about purposeless."

"It looks very like it, as far as one can judge, who reads only the sporting news and keeps clear of parliamentary dinners. I dare say you not unseldom catch yourself thinking that, from the midst of this medley, you might contrive to pull yourself to the fore?"

"A very natural thought, too, Stuart. But

about this offer—is it at all probable that Mr. Jardine will close with it?”

“In truth, I scarcely think it is. He and Maitland are not on the best terms. However, you now know quite as much about it as I do—that the offer has been made—and very probably you know the governor’s private sentiments much better than I do. Anyhow, if you don’t, you can find them out to-morrow evening. They have been complaining, my mother and my sisters I mean, that you have not put in an appearance for a week or more; and said I was to bring you to-night. You have an invitation, but have refused. Can’t you come?”

“No thanks; don’t feel up for company.”

“What is the matter? You were looking rather glum when I came in. Not got anything on that roarer, Star of Dawn, I hope. She has gone down nicely in the betting the last few days, and the race comes off in a fortnight.”

“Merely a few shillings, and those I went at the solicitation of Tom Lewis, who, poor beggar, has all his earthly wealth, a £10 note, invested on the mare. It was a fit of the blues, I suppose. I have been seeing how the vessel of State is drift-

ing aimlessly a prey to winds and waves, and what miserable little men it is who are pretending to guide her, and I have felt like a caged eagle ; but your information has put me all right, for if Wharfedale goes out, there will be a split in the Cabinet, and then, with Mr. Jardine's assistance, who can tell what opening may be afforded one ?”

“ You have much confidence in yourself, and more, you often say, in your luck. I am sure I wish you all success. But I rather fancy you are too impatient. Your ostensible career is the Bar, your private inclination is to politics. Yet, even there, you are not content to pace the toilsome road, but wish to rush into sudden notoriety. Have you been trying any of your old friends, the editors, lately ?”

“ Only once or twice, besides that article which you saw in last Saturday's ‘ Weekly.’ ”

“ That was a very good one. I have heard several speaking of it. But don't waste time in getting up a reputation as a journalist. Besides, you are not fitted for that line—you are intended for Nisi Prius rather than Chambers ; for a visible, rather than an invisible king of men.”

“Thanks, Stuart ; I ought to rise and bow. I, too, begin to think that at the Press, as in every other line of life, to obtain a reputation one must be blessed with the luck which Providence seems to have taken from my family, or the special connections ‘in the trade’ which I certainly do not possess.”

“Probably so, my friend. Don’t, however, run down the newspapers. Nobody knows you yet, and not unlikely your articles are not quite the stuff that suits the populus. Besides, that is at best a slow method of reaching celebrity. Better try a three volume novel, or a sensational drama, or, better still, stick to the law.”

“No, I can’t keep to Coke and Blackstone—it’s impossible. Cestus que trusts, and trespass gr. cl. fr., contingent remainders and bottomry bonds are continually getting into confusion worse confounded in my brain. Your proposal seems to solve the difficulty. I have not money or influence enough to get into Parliament unaided ; and affairs just now offer a capital opening for one. I have great doubts, however, whether joining the present Government would not be embarking in a sinking boat. Maitland

is certainly the real head; and if Wharfedale goes, I imagine the Premier and the more moderate men will go with him."

"Perhaps so. The governor decidedly is not a Rad; and if it comes to a choice between that flag and the Tories, I know which he will choose. But do not omit to come to dinner with us to-morrow—no one will be there—and then we can talk it over quietly."

"Thanks, I will. Seven o'clock?"

"Yes, that to half-past. But, dear me, what a time I have been. Excuse my running away. They will be wondering what has become of me."

"Don't trouble about it, though I am sorry you are obliged to be off. Good evening."

CHAPTER II.

WALTER AVONDALE came of a family situate for many centuries—indeed, from a period lost in the mists of the times anterior to the Conquest—in the vale of the Avon in Lyddonshire. A beautiful region is that which had been the home of his ancestors ; now a valley whose width may be measured by yards, shut in by low ridges scarcely worthy the name of hills, then the vale disappearing by insensible gradations into a broad plain ; valley and plain thickly timbered, and supplying rich pasture for herds of cattle. Through the midst runs a small stream, the Avon—the “water” *par excellence* of Lyddonshire—from which the district gets its own name, Avondale, a name adopted by its owners, though little but the name remains to them now.

Where the valley is narrowest, and the ridges the steepest, at the junction of the Avon with

another but smaller stream, is placed the Hall—A'nd'le Hall, as it is commonly known to the country people round. It is a low and straggling, but very roomy building; one of those edifices which were erected in the middle ages, and kept in repair by subsequent occupiers for their own comfort, and not to please the æsthetic notions of future times.

The Avondales, centuries ago, had possessed, not only the whole of Avondale, but a large portion of Lyddonshire besides. Gradually, however, their large possessions had departed from them. They were not courtiers, yet they were so ill-advised as always to fight for their God and their King—they would not be traders, yet they could not live on their lands as yeomen—so they lost, and what they lost they did not recover. Bit by bit the greater part had gone, some as a punishment for loyalty, the rest as a punishment for honesty, till now there remained to them as many acres as their forefathers had square miles.

Walter Avondale's father was a self-contained, moody, some said a sour-tempered man. His thoughts turned too much to the past, and he

had an utter contempt for the many successful traders who, attracted by the beauty of Lyddonshire, had settled around him.

His wife had died early and left him with two infant children, Walter and Edith. These he loved as only a man of strong mind, whose feelings have ever been repressed, can love. Walter had received an excellent education, physically and mentally, and not in mere book learning, but in whatever might best fit him for work in life. At home his father had indoctrinated him with his own love of and skill in manly exercises, and Shrewsbury's head-master had taken equal pains to instil into him an appreciation of the writers of antiquity. He had won a scholarship, and taken a good degree, both in the classical tripos and well up amongst the wranglers, at Trinity, Cambridge; and he was now trying to study law.

Edith was of the most perfect type of English womanhood. She was about six years younger than her brother, whom she much resembled, rather above the average height, and having a faultless form. Her bright blue eyes and delicate cheeks told of her country life. Her fair

flaxen hair hung in masses, but seldom seen in these degenerate days. She was a splendid horse-woman, a good linguist, and a skilful musician.

On Walter and Edith Mr. Avondale had lavished all his care, but even towards them he not unseeldom seemed stern and repelling. His peculiar idiosyncrasy can, however, easily be accounted for. Not a room in Avondale Hall but contains a memento of a time when his family took high rank amongst the magnates of his country. Here is a trophy brought back from the Holy Land in the third Crusade, there is a helmet battered and dented at Créci. In the entrance hall stand the suit of armour in which an ancestor died at Barnet, and a pile of cannon balls that Fairfax left as a parting gift. In the library are portraits of many a well-known warrior of his blood. Avondale Church, close by, contains six effigies of his most gallant forefathers.

And now all is passed away, and he is reduced to the position of a third-rate country squire. Such was, or rather such is, Mr. Avondale. Far better, doubtless, would it have been had he

striven to restore his family to their pristine glory, but his entry into life having been darkened and obscured by his father's excesses, and having been too proud to ask for assistance where it was not voluntarily offered, he has contented himself with sinking most of the feelings implanted in us by nature, in thorough contempt for humanity generally.

Of his neighbours may be particularised Mr. Tawson, a successful merchant who, from small beginnings, had amassed a large fortune. He came from Newbury, the chief town of Lyddonshire, a few miles from Avondale. There he returned with his wealth, bought a small property in the county, and built, not far from Avondale Hall, a big, red-bricked mansion. He had one child only, a daughter. He had also brought up a brother's son, who was now a captain in the army.

Mr. Avondale despised him as being a *parvenu*—he disliked Avondale for being what he was not, a gentleman.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CHARLES MCLEOD JARDINE, Vice-President in prospective of the Colonial Board, was one of those beings whom the fates delight to favour. An offshoot of an ancient but reduced Highland family, he had gone to Australia in early youth, with a light pocket and his father's blessing, to seek his fortune. He arrived there at the time when land *ad libitum* was bestowed on every applicant. It was truly then the "Squatter's Paradise." Some of these men possessed runs exceeding half-a-million acres, and supporting sheep numbered by hundreds of thousands. Amongst them Mr. Jardine, in a few years, became pre-eminent. Ample success attended all his undertakings, and, while yet a young man, he had amassed wealth more than sufficient to purchase the fee simple of many an English barony. The Gold Fever trebled his riches. He owned a considerable area around Melbourne, and, when

that place sprang in 1852 from an unimportant seaport to be the foremost city in the southern hemisphere, the value of some of that land increased a hundredfold.

From sheep-farming he turned to politics, and obtained a seat in the Victorian Legislature. His career here eclipsed in brilliancy his previous efforts. Eight years was he a member of that august body, during which period he underwent six general elections, and saw fifteen changes of Ministry, in ten of which he was included, being three times Premier, once Postmaster-General, twice Speaker, and twice Commissioner of Crown Lands.

After such a training, returning to England, he speedily entered Parliament as one of the representatives for Radford. In St. Stephen's he did not figure very conspicuously. His experience in Australia had not influenced him in favour of Republicanism, though neither had it converted him into a Tory.

He thus trimmed between the two great parties who rule the State. The one disliked him as not being, contrary to all legitimate reasoning, a thorough-going demagogue; the other, doubtful

that "anything good could come out of Galilee," considered that the man who had such a political training must necessarily be a confirmed foe to all existing institutions. His speeches always carried great weight, especially in matters concerning the colonies; he was admitted, on all hands, to be a most valuable supporter; but, from not having distinctly joined either party, he had not yet filled any office. The late Premier, Lord Liffey, too, and himself had not been on especially good terms.

Lord Liffey had been, in many respects, a remarkable man. He was an Irish peer, the last of his line, and had sat in the House from early youth, and been a member of not a few Ministries. His training was, therefore, of such a kind, and so lengthened, as necessarily to make him acquainted with most of the stock maxims of government, and with some of the principles in accordance with which the affairs of a country possessing a representative chamber may most skilfully be controlled. But he never became a statesman—he educated himself into a politician, and as such died, without attaining to, and, perhaps, without having been ambitious of, higher

distinction. He ever showed himself averse to real work ; he was very content to let things glide on in even course ; he avoided as far as practicable any interference with the institutions—social, legal, municipal—of the nation ; he hated unnecessary legislation. A Liberal in name, he was a Tory in all else, in inclination, in thought, in action. He never looked far into the future ; he made no attempt to provide for the possible contingencies of the hereafter, or for the possible requirements of coming generations ; he troubled nought about the ideal goal towards which the human race may be tending ; but, on the other hand, he was neither theorist nor schemer, neither philosopher nor bigot, and if he failed to comprehend the real position and the duties of the first Minister of a mighty empire—if, from narrowness of intellect or innate timidity, he proposed no means to redress the suffering and injustice which were rank, even in the country he ruled—he at least did his best to preserve order at home, and to secure respect abroad, and in this it cannot be said that he did not to some extent succeed. Above all, he was a thorough Englishman, and had an almost intuitive know-

ledge of the peculiarities and idiosyncracies of his fellow-subjects. His tact, too, was wonderful, his suavity of manners scarcely less remarkable, and, by dint of these qualities, he had won and long retained over the Lower House an influence such as few other statesmen had ever possessed. So thorough was his sway that he was oftener mentioned by the sobriquet of Magnus Jupiter than by his real name.

On his death the Earl of Garmouth, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, succeeded to his station. Garmouth, like Magnus Jupiter, had spent over half a century in Parliament, the greater portion of this period in the Commons. He was a man of little capacity and less invention, but what he lacked in these respects he more than made up in conceit and bad temper. He had supported most of the chief measures brought in by his party—most, not all, for on more than one occasion he had thrown himself into the arms of the Tories—and had assisted greatly to secure the success of several. But this was all. Not one important measure had he originated, not one comprehensive enactment was due to his unaided judgment. He was short in stature, and, like

all short men, he was a fussy meddler, never satisfied save when making a noise, and fancying he was performing some grand exploit. He bore just the same relation to the great legislators he was associated with that the stone-collector bears to the geologist who is deciphering the history of former creations—that the laboratory assistant bears to the physicist who is slowly unravelling the mysteries of nature. He was ever in a muddle, ever getting his particular department into hot water; and then he would loudly proclaim that the fault lay with his colleagues, not with himself. He and Magnus Jupiter had, in their younger days, been sworn foes; had in turn, when in opposition, worked the downfall of the Cabinet in which the other was a leading member; and even, when some years previously they had in their old age arranged their differences, neither would serve under the other in the Lower House, and he had, consequently, been relegated to an Earldom and comparative oblivion. We have said that on the late Premier's death the Earl succeeded to his post—he did not succeed to his tact or influence.

Indeed, the now Premier was only nominally

at the head of affairs, the real chief being the leader in the Lower House, Arthur Stuart Maitland, Secretary of State for the Home Department. Maitland's many-sided character will ever afford an interesting study to the moralist and psychologist. He was in some respects fitted, but in still more totally unfitted, for his position. An excellent scholar, a skilful financier, an experienced administrator, a fluent debater, a persuasive speaker—these were great points in his favour. But they were more than compensated by weaknesses almost infantine. He had little coolness, less tact, still less command of temper. He was thoroughly ambitious, greedy of power, passionately fond of distinction. He could not endure a rival, much less a superior, on his own side ; while the successes of opponents roused his bitterest hostility. His mind wanted balance ; he took but one view of a question, and that not unseldom the wrong one ; he was hasty as a child, illogical as a woman, ever jumping at conclusions, ever taking up positions from which retreat was impossible ; above all, his morbid craving for notoriety rendered him fickle and changeable, and not only had it turned him from

the Tories, who in youth sent him into Parliament, to the Liberals, whom he now controlled, but it also seemed on the point of converting him into a Radical. Such was Maitland, and with faults like these how could even his great gifts be other than a curse to himself, and a danger to his country? No wonder sage men looked on him with feelings very near akin to dread. He must shortly, very shortly, fill the highest post in the Government—to what lengths might not his headstrong passions urge him? How would he steer the vessel of the State through the many dangers that lowered thick around her, even in the near future? No wonder that between him and his less excitable colleagues little goodwill existed.

The Marquis of Wharfedale was the first with whom he openly quarrelled. The Marquis was the representative of a class. He possessed considerable estates in each of the three kingdoms; he came of an old family; his parliamentary experience was considerable, first in the House of Commons as member for his pocket-borough of Dacre; he had a good knowledge of the world; his manners were courtly, his bearing dignified,

though somewhat haughty, his taste highly cultivated. He had a needless contempt for trade and commerce, and as Maitland came from a race of merchants, this did not mend matters between them.

But other members of the Ministry could not brook the Home Secretary's overbearance. Sir Henry Kerr, President of the India Council, was one of these. His father, Malcolm Kerr, had been one of those Indian worthies of the olden sort, who, by brain and arm, built up the British Empire in the East, and he himself during the three years that he had filled his present office had greatly contributed to the material advancement of that empire. Railways ran across the Ganges and the Godavery, by Agra and Hyderabad, and along the base of the Himalayas; the telegraph connected every town of importance with the three capitals; irrigation works had been completed, or at least commenced wherever practicable; the destruction of the forests was stopped; and the annual expenditure confined itself within the current revenue. But there was every probability that his public utility would be sacrificed to private animosity.

Mr. Herbert Williams was another who objected to Maitland's views. At the urgent request of the late Premier, Mr. Williams had undertaken the post instituted by Lord Liffey, and perhaps the solitary instance of his lordship's innovations, of Minister of Education. Some years previously he had been, for a short period, Under Secretary for the Home Department, and in that office had gained much insight into the most pressing social wants, home and foreign. He had since acquired a thorough knowledge of the educational systems of the Continent, and this experience, added to his own innate talent, skill, and energy, had hitherto enabled him to discharge to the general satisfaction the very responsible duties of his present department, duties trying in themselves, and rendered doubly so by the necessity of making all arrangements without assistance from predecessors. It should not be forgotten that the peculiar difficulties of his task were, if possible, enhanced by the fact that he was a Nonconformist. He had, however, conciliated the Church without losing the esteem of his co-religionists, and, under his supervision, was

rapidly being laid the basis of that system of primary education which has done so much for the welfare, moral, mental, physical, of the present generation. But he hated humbug, he possessed ability, and he would not pander to popular prejudices, even to save his seat in the House.

The then Parliament had been summoned under the auspices of the late Premier, and his adherents in it greatly outnumbered the Tories. But these adherents were many of them Liberal in name, rather than in reality. They were perfectly willing and ready to entrust their great chief with the guidance and control of everything. In fact, they rather liked the arrangement. It saved them the bother of personally examining into and cogitating upon the merits of measures brought under their notice. It prevented the raising of angry debates upon excitable questions.

Under Magnus Jupiter the House became the pleasantest club in town. There members made their appointments and met their acquaintances. The evenings were passed in friendly chat; disagreeable topics were quietly tabooed; irre-

pressible reformers lost their zeal, and impassioned orators toned down their flaming eloquence; no man spake harshly of his neighbour, or employed sarcasm against a foe; corruption and extravagance had passed from the land, for none ever alluded to such vices.

“A holy calm upon the building fell,
No hostile tones jarred through it night or day,
And all went merry as a marriage-bell,
Till Magnus Jupiter was called away.”

And even then not at first did a change occur. But the cunning hand and the clear head were gone, and those who had observed all the directions of the deceased Premier were not inclined to pay a similar submission to those of the Earl of Garmouth. One session had the Earl held his position, another was now half over, but discontent and disturbance were rife. Maitland was burning to take the reins, and the Radicals, whose doctrines, while Magnus Jupiter survived, had been rather under a cloud, were scheming to secure the promulgation of their peculiar tenets, and were desirous of supporting Maitland against the aristocratic part of his Cabinet.

On the other hand, many of the Liberals,

the Whig Liberals of the old school, inclined far more towards Toryism than Radicalism; but they were timid, dubious, undecided. They hesitated to ally themselves with the Tories, they had no definite principles of their own, they had no leader. It was to these and their peculiar position that Avondale's thoughts had often turned; and now the impending changes in the Cabinet, and the split that must be thereby occasioned, however much it might be concealed and smoothed over, throughout the Liberal party, were fanning into full flame the dangerous spark of ambition that had ever lain glowing in his breast.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. JARDINE'S dinner must be denominated quiet. The party included, besides his own family and three or four fashionable nobodies, Mr. William FitzHenry and the Hon. E. Mordaunt Tracy; both men in the prime of life.

The former, a highly successful advocate and a fair lawyer and a Q.C., sat in the House as member for King's Langton. A brilliant speaker and a useful debater, he was a most useful adherent to any cause, but he had not yet definitely allied himself to either party.

The latter, a scion of the ducal house of Lincoln, a genuine Whig, with connections extending through a dozen families and influencing a score of elections, was a man of mark, and he possessed shrewdness, tact, and ability amply sufficient to enable him fully to utilise his advantages of rank and connections.

Dinner over and the ladies withdrawn, politics naturally became the subject of conversation.

“What do you think of the Government just at present, Tracy?” asked FitzHenry.

“Rather so so; but it is difficult to have any fixed opinion. Ask our host. He ought to know—he has been offered a post.”

“Not exactly; in fact, not at all. I have had a species of communication, but I am not certain whether it is from the Earl or Maitland.”

“The Earl, I imagine; you are not pronounced enough for the other.”

“Is it true,” queried the Q.C., “that Wharfedale has determined to resign?”

“I am not certain,” replied Tracy, “but if so—and I think it is very likely—there will be a thorough revolution in the Ministry. The Premier will give up on the plea of old age, and half the Cabinet will follow him—on no plea but that of dislike to the new leader.”

“And their places will be filled with Republicans—not much less than a political earthquake, that. By the by, Avondale, you should get a seat now. There is every chance for a young man of ability, and your name would ensure you a hearing.”

“I have been thinking of it very much lately, but scarcely see my way clear. Power, however, seems to be falling more and more into the hands of mere adventurers, and I do not think I could enrol myself under that banner.”

“Yes,” said Tracy, “you certainly should do so. I have often heard the governor speak of your grandfather. His doings were the talk of the town. He was famed for wildness (‘unfortunately much too wild for us’) at a time when dissipation was a virtue; but he was not without influence in Parliament. Have you ever heard the story about his not being able to find the Speaker? He and Vrynne were coming into the House one evening, when, after trying for two or three minutes to make out who were present, he said—

“‘Vrynne, where is the Speaker? I can’t see any one in the chair.’

“Can’t you?” answered his companion. “‘I can see two!’

“But, talking of chances, who is to be the next Solicitor-General; eh, FitzHenry? If these changes take place, Brentford will hardly remain

Chancellor, and I suppose Sir Edward Pilgrim would take his place."

"No, Pilgrim won't accept office with the Radicals. Maitland will have to replace Eastbourne—and that splendid lawyer's private character is too much blown upon to admit of the experiment—or must raise one of the Lords Justices or the Chief Baron. As for my own part, I think I should hesitate before committing myself to such an advanced party."

"I think you would do wisely. You have a splendid practice, which I imagine would be lessened by your becoming one of the Crown law officers. And there is no disguising the fact that the present disruption is owing to Maitland's temper and ambition, nor is there any guarantee that his tact in future will be sufficient to control his heterogeneous following. What say you, Jardine?"

"Time will tell. England is not fitted for a Republic; and if it were, the hour is not yet come, nor is Maitland the man."

"No," laughed FitzHenry; "nor, I suppose, you would add, her Colonies either. How many

times, my dear sir, were you ejected from offices during your half-a-dozen years of Parliamentary life at Melbourne?"

"About ten, I believe; but it was generally the fault of the Attorney-General. The lawyers there are most unmanageable; and once I thought of dispensing altogether with a legal adviser, and trying myself to supply his place."

"An interesting community it must be. Better send Master Stuart out there for a year or two before inducting him into the more sedate life in Downing Street."

"Don't plume yourselves on your own urbanity and politeness, Mr. FitzHenry. I might get into worse habits by beginning my career at home. It was only the other day that the honourable member for—I forget the place—wishing to make a particularly smart reply to an observation of Reuben Hardhead's, said, 'He thanked God his borough was not represented by a buffoon.' I have read, *Ex uno disce omnes*."

"Don't be quite so hard on us, my young friend. That was two years ago; Hardhead, unfortunately for the House's amusement, lost his seat at the

last election. Who besides Brentford will follow the Premier, Tracy?"

"Kerr, perhaps; Williams undoubtedly."

"But why allow Maitland to have it all his own way?" put in Avondale. "Why not reverse matters? These seceders are amongst our most prominent statesmen; their overbearing colleague is a new man; is it a fact that their supporters are less numerous than his?"

"They may not be less in number, but they have no distinct leader. The Liberal party is thoroughly broken up, and Maitland, being at the head of the only compact section of it, is, for the present, master of the situation. He will keep his position just as long as he maintains his vantage-ground. If his opponents would once unite, his rule would come to an end, but I do not see who is to be the chief—there is no one with pre-eminent influence. Garmouth is past his time; Kerr is just the reverse, too young; and Jardine here is not sufficiently known. There is Wyre, a Liberal at heart, who would be just the man, but for his connections. As it is, the choice is between Maitland and the Tories."

"Pity," said Jardine, "a coalition could not

be brought about between the moderate men on both sides."

"Yes, but these are dreadfully afraid of each other."

"Meanwhile," added Avondale, "the country is to be started on the road to revolution."

"Well, gentlemen," interrupted the host, "had we not better join the ladies?"

They adjourned to the drawing-room. Avondale received an invitation to accompany Mr. Jardine to a fête, a few days later, at the Horticultural Gardens. Most of the company withdrew, but, before Avondale left, he and his host had a few minutes' conversation.

"Stuart tells me he mentioned to you the proposition that has been partly made to me. What is your opinion of it?"

"I should very much like to become your private secretary, if it were carried out; but, from what was stated just now, one would doubt it. Besides, my dear sir, could not you demand a seat in the Cabinet; not merely a vice-presidency?"

"Yes, I think so. Of course, I have not in the least closed with the proposal. And, as you

say, it is very questionable how long it will remain open. Every hour the position of the Ministry becomes more delicate. They will not, perhaps, be defeated on their intended reduction of duties, but the third reading will be carried by so small a majority that a crisis will occur. Either the whole Ministry will resign, or the Premier only, being succeeded by Maitland, in the hope that the change may infuse new life into the party. If this happens, the reduction will, doubtless, be abandoned, and a complete measure of taxation will be introduced next year. The new-formed Ministry I shall not join; it will not hold together long, though it is not very manifest who will succeed them."

"That is what I cannot understand. Maitland is an upstart, a good debater and financier perhaps, but—so those who know him, yourself, for instance, assert—without the capacity either to moderate his own temper or to control his associates."

"Yes, Avondale, that is the case, but, as Tracy reminded us just now, he has the advantage. The influence of the nobility has been very much lessened during the last quarter of a

century; one or two of its members have associated themselves with the Radicals; and, consequently, they are all afraid of each other. This divided authority rightly belongs to the middle-class, but this section of the community never does clearly comprehend its own importance. Occupied with the one idea of getting money, they concern themselves about nothing else, interfering as little in the affairs of Government as if these were matters entirely beyond their province. The lowest orders, however, are never without their stump orators, restless demagogues who exist by their ravings, and who keep their listeners in a constant state of agitation. Thus it happens that we are ever hearing of the demands and wishes, and power and strength of the unwashed populace; and thus it happens also that what the aristocracy has lost appears to have been transferred in all its entirety to the mob."

"But this is just what I cannot understand. At the beginning of this century the nobility were all-powerful, or, at least, they in conjunction with the better portion of the middle-class. Now it looks as if we all intended to prostrate ourselves before the majesty of King Mob."

“The spirit of the age, Walter.”

“Rather the weakness and timidity and irresolution of men in your own position, sir. Here is Maitland, a Radical now, whatever he was twenty years ago, arrogating to himself the premiership in a House elected under the auspices of Magnus Jupiter. You are all playing into his hands; you stand aside while he struts forward. His personal friends are, at most, a dozen; the Liberals, who believe in him, are, say, twice as many, the less rampant of the Rads about the same number, add to these the waifs and strays, perhaps thirty, who float about in the political atmosphere, light as feathers, being unweighted with brains or principles—and you get a motley crew of seventy to ninety. You allow these to control full three hundred of your own associates, and to paralyse all your efforts.”

“Well, so it is; but what is to be done? Maitland's party may be small in ability, and in numbers, but they are organised, and he has a great advantage over his opponents from being first in the field, and in possession of the Government stronghold.”

“From which you ought to oust him. He is

avowedly a poor tactician ; it would require no very skilful general to bring him to grief. And why need the moderate Liberals be any longer disorganised ?”

“ Because they have no one with brains enough to whip them up together. You had better undertake that duty, Avondale. Tracy gave you a piece of advice just now—‘get into Parliament.’ I will add to it—get some prominent Peer to put himself at the head of the Liberals,—he would soon gather round his banner a goodly muster.”

“ More easily said than done, sir. Excuse my asking one question. I see you are anxious to be attending to your guests. Do you think Tracy, just now, was speaking his inmost opinions when he was inveighing against Maitland ?”

“ Can’t say ; but, whether he was or not, undoubtedly if Maitland offered him a post he would take it.”

“ And such an offer might easily be made, if only to secure the support of the Lincoln family ?”

“ Yes.”

CHAPTER V.

OH, ambition! the incentive of every noble soul. What were life without thee but the mere existence of a brute—a succession of night and day, summer and winter—a constant round of petty employments, and still more petty desires—so many years, more or less, of eating, drinking, sleeping, moiling—and then the end, the disappearance once and for ever from the world's record? Under many a form thou appearest, in many a hidden scene thine influence is manifest. The patriot's love for his fatherland, the statesman's craving for honour, the soldier's hunger for renown, the student's thirst for knowledge—all alike are originated by thee. What robs the stake and the scaffold of their terrors, what nerves the traveller, wandering faint and perishing over untrodden wilds; what supports the philosopher under the unreasoning sneers of inane foplings—what, but the trust in the here-

after? Oh fame, my guiding star, eagerly have I followed thy rays. Cold and deceptive are they to the timorous and unstable, but full of strength to the determined and patient. Clear and direct is the route they point out, but surrounded by precipices, causing destruction to wanderers from the way. Long and difficult is the ascent to thy mansion—slowly, carefully, hopefully am I climbing it. Aid me to accomplish it.

Vast is the change that occurs in the mind of a young man when first there is aroused in him a longing for celebrity. It is born in some much earlier than in others, while not a few die without experiencing its promptings. Here and there is one whose childhood's days are tinged with dreams of future glory. Manhood's aspirations take the place of boyhood's games. Not unseldom 'tis such as these that turn the whole current of a nation's history. Wish, will, determination they have ; experience alone is wanting, and this is often more than counterbalanced by unquailing confidence. It is a fault on the better side. The defects of old age are too generally real vices. Its hesitation degenerates into mistrust, its caution into cowardice, its over-

estimation of an opponent's resources into undervaluing a friend's support. It permits mischief to become powerful from too long considering how best it may be resisted. It allows a vice to fix itself beyond power of eradication from hesitating to take measures against it. Just the reverse are the errors committed by youth ; and they are of far less importance. They are never irreparable, never involving loss of time, never producing loss of hope. Procrastination is the watchword of the one, progress of the other. The former would stop the motion of the universe for fear its different parts should get into confusion, the latter would add to its speed, trusting thereby to improve the course of nature.

Avondale walked back to his chambers from Belgrave Gardens. Varied thoughts came whirling through his brain, but they pointed out to him somewhat indistinctly a goal which he had previously, in his hours of musing, marked for himself. The evening's conversation, too, would come back, chance words perhaps, but not without significance—

“ You should try to get a seat ; there is now a very good opportunity for a young man.”

Yes, here is what he had panted after. The Liberals were disorganised—could he not obtain a chief for them, and discipline them into a compact party again? Might he not aspire to a place among their chiefs, and to a seat in their councils?

“Get some prominent peer to put himself at their head,” Mr. Jardine had said, half seriously.

He thought of the greatness of his family in bygone days, of the foremost place his name had filled in annals of the olden time. He thought of the position it now occupied—swept off from the arena of public life, vanished from the sight, almost from the memory of men.

He thought of all this, and more clearly and distinctly rose before him the task he resolved upon. Young he was, but not younger than William of Orange when he checkmated the grey-headed counsellors of Louis le Grand, or than Pitt when he swayed the empire. Ability and intellect his career at Cambridge assured him of, where, though a desultory and unwilling reader, he had been high in the class lists. Courage, energy, audacity—three indispensable requisites for political success—his ancestors had

ever been noted for ; could he have degenerated from them ? A far deeper acquaintance he had with the ways of the world than any of his associates—what more was wanting ? Free, unencumbered, self-reliant, buoyant, he entered the lists—his inmost heart assured him of ultimate success.

Glorious is the award that awaits the victorious politician ; friends, rivals, and opponents unite to sing the pæan of praise, and his country hastens to do him honour ; delicious, tenfold delicious, is the cup that is pressed to his lips—by one hour of such bliss who would not think years of labour and anxiety more than overpaid ?

Such were Avondale's feelings.

But who was to be the leader ? This was the question that perplexed all, and he must settle it to his own satisfaction before he could venture to enter on the more difficult part of his undertaking. He ran over the names of the peers who took a foremost share in politics, but not one seemed exactly suitable. Wyre, as Tracy had expressed it, would be just the man but for his connections, his father, the Earl of Wigan, being the Tory chief. Then there was the Earl of Cotteswold,

one, nominally, like Wyre, a Tory, but his views were not definite, and he would, therefore, probably be distrusted by both sides. The Duke of Lincoln was the most eligible, but he, too, was a Tory in name, and to get him would necessitate the securing Mordaunt Tracy, and of this latter gentleman Avondale was somewhat doubtful.

Two others remained, known to Avondale by name and repute—the Marquis of Wharfedale and the Marquis of Exmoor, eldest son of the Duke of Dammonia, both members of the existing Government, both highly respected. These seemed, after careful thought, the most eligible for Avondale's purpose, should opportunity be offered of sounding their sentiments.

CHAPTER VI.

THE "Morning Mercury" was the newspaper which considered itself the exponent of Maitland's section. It had a wide circulation, but exerted not much influence on public opinion. Its "leaders" could be credited with both these results. They were, indeed, curious specimens of word-building. Matter they never contained, it was wholly unnecessary, but sentence after sentence was manufactured *ad libitum*, antithesis followed antithesis, and the "agony" was piled up to such an excruciating point that when the climax did come its effect was overpowering. Overpowering, unfortunately, on the wrong side, for the writers, competent enough at producing masses of "copy," were utterly unable to guide the feelings of their readers to the destined end, and their pathos would, spite of all their efforts, degenerate into bathos. Nevertheless, they were wonderful articles. *Non cugusvis est literas*

componere, a hundredfold more difficult is it to fill a whole column of print about—nothing, and the achievement deserves a proportionate acknowledgment. One other feature characterised this journal, and that was the unqualified laudation it bestowed on him whose opinions it supported. His sentiments were the height of wisdom. They sprang from a heart which was ever open to the cry of suffering, and were guided by a hand that never plotted his neighbour's confusion; they were spotlessly pure, immaculate, infallible; certainly more than human, and scarcely less than divine. His intentions were, like the *thermistes* of Homer's kings, Jove-prompted. Justice to all was their motto—especially to one's own friends, some carping critics added—and free scope to the most deserving—with always the chief post for himself, was a similar emendation.

This journal Avondale had, of late, regularly perused, employing it as an index of the state of the Cabinet. On opening it next morning the first leader caught his eye. It was an unconcealed attack on the moderate portion of the Ministry—

“For six years the country and the country’s resources lay dormant under the lethargic sway of the late Premier. The effects of that trance have not yet passed away ; but we see in the distance a change—we might be justified in saying a revolution—coming on. Slowly, though surely, it is approaching ; impending events may hasten its advent. The present Government is but attempting some most necessary reforms in the methods of levying taxes, and yet the attempt is meeting with strenuous opposition. Not only are the hereditary adversaries of advance and improvement exerting all their efforts, but also many hitherto styled Liberals—and even some admitted to the councils of the party—are striving to make the work of reform impossible. These tactics can have but one result. They will arouse the people to a knowledge of their real interests ; they will bring out into clear light the distinction between treacherous adherents and reliable supporters. They will, in a word, bring matters to a crisis ; and for this we feel no regret—a deceitful friend is worse than an open enemy. But, beyond this, they will have another consequence. The nation once quickened to the vital necessity

of itself directing its own affairs, will remove the weak and timorous from the management, and place itself under the guidance of active, energetic, far-seeing men.”

“That is not bad,” ejaculated Avondale, “for a cut at Garmouth and Wharfedale. Some notice will have to be taken of it, yet it will scarcely be repudiated. It is so outspoken that the editor must have been well certain what he was about before allowing it to appear. Let me see. To-night brings on the third reading of the Bill for lowering the duties. Parties are pretty evenly matched in respect to it. If one could persuade Jardine to speak against it, his vote would doubtless turn the scale, and bring on the crisis rather more suddenly than the article anticipates.”

While he was musing, Stuart Jardine was ushered in.

“What, Walter, you barely out of bed yet ; and it is past eleven. Haven’t you begun breakfast?”

“Oh, yes; finished. Don’t look so disgusted, my dear fellow; I did not get to sleep very early last night, and I have been looking over this paper the last half-hour.”

“What is there in it to keep you up in such a bright May morning?”

“Only a feeler; read it yourself while I put off this dressing-gown. But what brings you here at this hour?”

“Oh, I forgot. You must come to lunch, to arrange with the mater about the flower show to-morrow.”

“Just the thing. I suppose the governor will be at home; I wish to see him.”

“Yes, I daresay; but what is the matter?”

“Not much. Excuse me a minute or two.”

He made his appearance again in a short time, and they strolled off together, down Piccadilly, and across Hyde Park.

“Well, Stuart, what do you think of the article?”

“I scarcely read it. Can’t understand how fellows will bother so much about other people’s affairs, and blackguard one another like so many costermongers. It may be glory; but, at first blush, the prospect certainly is not very inviting.”

“*Chacun à son goût*; but are those your inmost sentiments, my friend?”

“ Yes ; that is, qualified. I don’t despise fame—true fame, mind you. I can honour a man who dies for

‘ The ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his gods,’

or who gives up everything for the love of truth. In case of necessity, I hope I shall not be found wanting. But politics is altogether a different concern. A successful statesman must be crafty, treacherous, apt at lying, skilful at dissimulation, ever ready to give up old opinions, or to throw off old acquaintances, and to embrace new ones—a thorough scoundrel, in fact, who in common life would not be tolerated for an instant. Honesty is only an incumbrance, and he soon gets rid of it ; honour he claims to possess—but very unnecessarily, for no one ever credits him with it ; religion he may have, but it must be of a strange creed. Longfellow, however, somewhere hints that Lucifer may not be wholly past praying for, but be reserved for some good purpose not yet known.”

“ You paint a dark picture. Do you forget Pitt, and Canning, and Peel ?”

“ No ; nor Shaftesbury, nor Walpole, nor the

Pelhams. There is one for each of yours. But here is Talbot coming ; who would have thought of meeting him at this early period ?”

Talbot came up, and walked on with them—a thick-set, somewhat affected young man, not much past his twenty-second birthday. His face told his birth—he was a younger son of Viscount Risborough—and told, too, a weakness of character and a tendency to dissipation. His easy disposition and yielding nature made him a general favourite; but they also made him a ready victim to the allurements of sharpers, and he was, consequently, more addicted to the gaming-table than his relatives would have approved.

“I called at your place last night, Avondale, but you were out.”

“Yes. Wanted me to go to the Adelphi, I suppose?”

“No. I intended to go to Clair Street. I have lost there rather heavily once or twice lately, and wished you to look on to see fair play.”

“Better keep away from the place altogether. It is a regular hell. Have you ever seen it, Stuart?”

“No. Since you saved me from destruction at Cambridge, I have fought shy of dice and cards. I never could clearly see how it was I became involved in that affair; and, therefore, I have kept clear of any approach to its repetition.”

“I don’t see the force of your reasoning,” objected Talbot. “If you once get bitten that is no reason why ever after you should eschew the game.”

“I don’t know what you understand by bitten. If it means risking honour and character to enrich a parcel of thieves, I imagine it is every reason why you should avoid it in future.”

“Oh, no! If I had any idea I should get into such a scrape, I would never touch a card again. The people one meets at Clair Street are not sharpers. Brooke, the proprietor, never plays; he makes his money out of the payments made at the door. You know most who go there—Wyversley, Sinclair, Tom Lewis (I fancy he is paid to mark at billiards), young Stansville, and your friend Dawson.”

“Yes; I believe Dawson is rather too well acquainted with such places,” replied Avondale;

“and I am sorry for it. Do you take my advice, and give up gambling in time.”

“Of course, I shall ; but do oblige me by coming in one evening. I don’t for an instant suspect any underhand work ; but, if you would just look on, perhaps I should recover my luck.”

“Very complimentary you are getting. I have no objection to dropping in once, just to show Stuart the establishment, if he will venture to accompany us.”

“I will go with pleasure,” replied Jardine, “if any information is to be gained from the visit.”

“Thanks ; so do. When will be most convenient for you, Avondale?”

“Any day. But, stay ; the night before the Derby would be the best opportunity for our friend to add to his experience.”

“That is a fortnight yet ; but I suppose I must be content. Excuse me. Here is Lady Barnet’s carriage coming ; I must say a few words to her.”

He left them ; and the two friends passed on, bowing to her ladyship as she rolled by, and receiving a gracious salutation in return.

CHAPTER VII.

LUNCHEON over, and the arrangements for the morrow's fête satisfactorily settled, Avondale, making an apology to the ladies, sought out Mr. Jardine. He found him in his usual sanctum, the library.

"Are you very busily engaged, sir?"

"No, not at all; after I have directed these two or three letters, if you have anything for me."

He went on scribbling for a few minutes, making, meanwhile, observations on the fine weather, and the beautiful foliage the trees were putting on. "And now I am at your service."

"I had better come direct to the point. Have you seen this morning's 'Mercury'?"

"No; I never read it. Why?"

"There is an interesting article in the forefront. Perhaps you would look at it. It bears most unmistakably the impress of inspiration."

Mr. Jardine took the paper extended him, glanced hastily over the part pointed out, and then reperused it more carefully.

“Well ; what conclusion do you draw, Walter ?”

“Feathers are frequently thrown up to see which way the wind blows. Is not this a direct attack on certain of Maitland’s colleagues ?”

“Very possibly ; what then ? They cannot notice it ; there is but one course before them.”

“Excuse my venturing to hazard an opinion. Every one tactily submits to his vagaries because they must ; that is the sum total of the reason. If the Premier and Wharfedale, and so forth, are to resign, is it absolutely necessary that they should accept their fate as a dispensation of Providence ? Instead of humbly yielding up all authority into the hands of him who kicks them out, would they and their friends not feel some satisfaction in making his position as precarious as possible ? My dear sir, you have, it seems to me, a rare occasion for putting yourself forward. You will not join Maitland ; why not, then, throw your weight into the scale against him, and boldly claim for yourself a place amongst the

leaders? This article plainly enough refers to the opposition aroused against the abolition of minor duties. The rejection of the proposal would at ordinary times affect the Government; but it would now be seized upon by the advanced section as an excuse for bringing matters to an issue. Their plans may not yet be quite matured, and the incontinent defeat of the measure might disconcert them. Anyhow, it would precipitate what must shortly happen. Pardon my presumption; you have some following, and still more influence in the House. Go down to-night—the third reading comes off—speak against the Bill, and divide. You will, beyond question, be in the majority. We shall have an adjournment for some days; and, when Parliament next meets, it will be shown what the future Government is to be.”

“You speak as if you were our leader, urging us on. The opinions you have just put forth are my own; but I hesitate to be too hasty. I do not like to cut away the ground beneath my feet; and if I did not meet with the support you anticipate, I should both injure the interests of my friends, and not advance my own credit.”

“The Rubicon must be crossed at some time or other. I feel morally certain that you would defeat the Government, and, taking a fair view of the political horizon, I cannot imagine how such a proceeding could be productive of anything but advantage to your side.”

“Well, I will carefully consider what best to do before the debate comes on. I may and I may not take your advice. I will, of course, meanwhile consult with some of the members who have the same ideas as myself in the matter.”

CHAPTER VIII.

AVONDALE went back to Graunstone Street, and thence to his Club, the Western. In Piccadilly he met one of the frequenters of Clair Street Maison d'Or—the Earl of Wyversley.

Wyversley was just entering life, not yet much past his twenty-third year. His title, one of the most renowned, if not one of the oldest in the United Kingdom, admitted him at once, on arriving at manhood, into the best society. His property, large at his father's death, had been much increased in value by careful management during a long minority; and, in addition, the unspent yearly balances had accumulated at his banker's to over £300,000. His talents, exceeding the average, had been very carefully expanded, at first under the direct personal supervision of his mother, who still survived, and afterwards under the best tutors that could be obtained.

His demeanour as a child had been all that could be desired—docile, attentive, affectionate ; but this goodness of disposition became his curse as he passed from boyhood. The harpies of modern life marked him for their prey, and, ere he left Oxford he had yielded to their machinations.

Easy enough is it for the wealthy and noble to secure the friendship of the learned and honourable. Difficult is it for them, if in the least degree open to the allurements of dissipation, to avoid the fellowship of blacklegs and knaves. All flattery is pleasant ; not a vice but has some attractive points. Delirious is the first draught of life which a youth takes when 'tis the supple cunning fingers of his own age that mix the cup, and witching beauty that holds it to his lips. Hotter and hotter courses the fiery blood through the veins, and maddening grow the passions when liquid eyes beam love upon us, and wreathing arms enfold us round, when lip to lip and heart to heart unchecked the siren's form we press. Once, once only, can the excitement be tasted in full fruition, and it never can return.

Even already Wyversley was wearying of the

life he had plunged into. Cards and dice afforded little amusement, the billiard-table had lost its charm, wine had never been a potent instrument of temptation, even women's wiles were beginning to lose their efficacy; and he was now thinking of varying his amusements by keeping a regular racing stable, and had bought one or two horses as a first instalment. Consequently, he was sauntering along, desperately hard up apparently for some mode of killing time, and his eye brightened as he recognised Avondale.

"How d'ye do? Glad to see you—where have you been this long time?"

"Not out of town; but may I ask you the same question, Wyversley? You have kept rather quiet lately."

"I? I can scarcely tell—over to Paris, I believe, for a week or two at Easter—but I have been in town the last fortnight, and I am heartily tired of it. Can you suggest any mode of killing time?"

"Killing time, my dear fellow! Why, your every wish is satisfied almost before it is formed. Tired of London, and the season is hardly begun."

“I know it is, and yet lately there is a miserable kind of inanity will keep coming over one. Two years ago I could not have credited that *ennui* could ever so thoroughly possess me. I have an idea of dabbling in racing—or running the Brighton coach again. It would be something fresh.”

“That would be a regular case of the devil finding work for idle hands. Your present mode of living is—don’t be astonished at my preaching—foolish enough, but let us hope it is only sowing your wild oats. If you go to the turf you will infallibly be dragged into a whirlpool from which there is little chance of escape. And for your mother’s sake, if not your own, don’t run the risk of that. Don’t forget that times have thoroughly altered since the days of the Regency. What would then have been the outburst of fresh spirits, or an amiable weakness would now be considered as little better than downright crime.”

“A better sermon than I gave you credit for, Avondale—but, I dare say, it is not far wrong.”

“What more could you desire than you have? Wealth, rank, abilities—every opportunity that

man can ask for. Don't disgrace the conqueror of Erdfort, or the Minister who signed the treaty of Naples. Take your seat in the House ; or, if you imagine you have not much experience yet, go for a two years' tour to India and the East, and back through the United States and Canada."

"I have seen the latter. I went there during one of the 'longs,' with Dr. Watson. Mother was particularly anxious I should see the new world ; she thinks it necessary every fellow in Parliament should get acquainted with the 'Yankees.'"

"And the Countess is quite right. Won't you try to return her kindness by making good use of your station?"

"So I should if you, or some one of your stamp, were always with me. But those fellows get round one—and, then, there are the women—you have never proved the force of their wiles. Ah ! do you know Auricoma ? She is beautiful ; and a splendid girl, too ; no nonsense about her, or conceit. She cut your friend Dawson finely the other evening."

"Dawson is certainly not a friend of mine.

There is something about him that excites, I can't tell why, my dislike."

"One of your Dr. Fells, though his cousin is not—at least, that's the report. There are a number of people out this afternoon." (They had reached the park, and were going down Rotten Row.) "The Lady's Mile is beginning to look lively once more. See, there's Kate Vandeleur and old Killarney sticking close to her. I suppose I must take off my hat, but I should prefer telling her my opinion of the way she is treating Sinclair."

Miss Vandeleur, a showy girl, riding a spirited horse, reined up at Wyversley's salutation, but his lordship, apparently not noticing, had passed on.

"Mrs. Marshland; do you see her carriage? One would imagine she had never heard of the Divorce Court. Lady Barnet, too. Go where you will, one comes across her."

"Yes; I met her the other side this morning."

"You don't know her? She is the centre of half the political intrigues of the day."

"Really? I had better make her acquaintance, then?"

“Why? I thought you were going to the Bar. You don’t intend changing?”

“I do, seriously. The law is not inviting to some, and I think I could do better in politics.”

“I am glad to hear it. If my assistance can be of any service, you are welcome to it. How long will the present Government stand, that is as it is?”

“Till to-morrow morning, perhaps.”

“You don’t give it a lengthened life. I should like to have a talk with you some evening. But here is the fair lady we were speaking about.”

A natty Victoria dashed by, drawn by two grey ponies. A flush, more akin to love than mere pleasure, lit up the Earl of Wyversley’s cheeks as he bowed to the sole occupant, and received in return a winning smile.

It was Auricoma, the “golden-haired,” and well she deserved the appellation. Her luxuriant auburn locks were familiar to every frequenter of the parks; but these formed not her sole attractions. A fine figure and excellent carriage, a beautiful countenance and beaming eyes, joined to an equable temper and graceful manners,

made her undisputed queen of her class—made her, too, the successful rival of many a high-born belle, and the dread of many an anxious mother. Not only lads from Eton, and youths from the Universities, but older men, who had seen much of the world, sought her company, and flocked to her villa at Chelsea; and thus, the name of her whose very existence should have been ignored was often heard in West End drawing-rooms, and modest ladies scorned not openly to envy her influence, and unblushingly to imitate her actions and mode of dress. Eight years previously she had come to town as attendant at a restaurant. A short apprenticeship there naturally fitted her for the boards of a small theatre, where good looks, rather than acting, formed the attraction. The glitter of the stage and the applause of the audience fanned still more the innate pride that first had incited her to leave her native village. She assumed her present mode of living, and for the past three seasons she had filled a position, understood, if not recognised in society. She occupied a box at the opera, and, when there, was never unaccompanied; her equipage was the model of

perfection, her receptions rivalled those of the Countess of Garmouth, and even of Lady Barnet ; in a word, she was a sign, a striking sign of the newer order of things drawing on.

Wyversley soon remembered that he had an engagement, and, having pressed his friend to call upon him, took his departure.

CHAPTER IX.

AVONDALE turned back to his club. He found rather an unusual number of members congregated. The position of the Ministry naturally formed the topic of conversation. From that inexplicable species of prescience which coming events so oft excite in men's minds, there had arisen a very prevalent feeling that the night's debate would give birth to some fresh arrangement. All sorts of speculations were hazarded. Some thought that the Premier alone would vacate office; others that he would be followed by his own immediate friends; while a few hazarded the opinion that the other section would resign; and here and there a solitary individual even ventured to suggest that perhaps the Tories might be called in.

Such an idea, however, could be looked upon as little more than a joke. This party was in a minority of at least fifty. They were, it is

true, very compact—compact as a body, that is. Amongst the leaders there existed considerable disunion. Their only hope of getting into power lay in the thorough disintegration of their opponents—a not very likely probability. Toryism was, in fact, under a cloud, and had been so for some time past—during the whole of the closing period of the late Premier's life. Its tenets had become considerably modified, if not altogether changed. Some observers were hardy enough to assert that it was a *vox et præterea nihil*; that the party, as far as it possessed real existence, existed only to gratify the ambition of those who were at its head, rather than as representing distinct principles; that if ever again it wielded the reins of Government it would find its traditions but evanescent myths, and would be necessitated by the mere alteration and advance of the nation's interest to follow the broad route marked out by their opponents.

From the main body of Liberals the Radicals must be distinguished. They were not strong either in numbers—a wide estimate would scarcely reckon them at three score—or in principles; the vast bulk of the English nation is, as

it ever has been at heart, imbued with a love for long-tried principles and long-confirmed traditions, and doubtful of the expediency of changing existing institutions for new-fangled, unproved notions. But the Radicals were—at least in their own estimation—a power in the State; and, indeed, received considerable deference even from those who thoroughly disagreed with them. Many causes produced this. They had, more than any other party, distinct, well-defined aims before them; and the importance of such an object in adding to the weight of any body of men cannot be overvalued. They stood between the two great powers into which the nation has ever been divided, and thus they were often enabled to bend each to their peculiar views.

But what, beyond anything else, gave them an unreal significance in the eyes of the world was the possession of orators of more than stentorian lungs, and of irrepressible volubility. This has ever been a characteristic of Republicanism, of that advanced Liberalism which, having no real basis in the natural order of things, maintains itself solely by the persistent spreading of its own doctrines, and the unqualified condemnation

of those of others—a mode of procedure which not unseldom has some success with the uneducated and the ill-judging.

Of these orators, the most notorious was Mr. Jonathan Sloe, M.P. for Shodditon—a man endowed with a good voice and great command of language, and having considerable knowledge of human nature, and more than English determination and obstinacy. He was now advancing in years, had long been in the House, and had of late become very intimate with Maitland.

CHAPTER X.

EXPECTATION drew Avondale from his bed next morning a full hour before his general time of rising. He got over his breakfast with unwonted celerity, and eagerly directed his attention to the "Times." The abstract of Parliamentary business gave him the information he longed for, but scarcely hoped to find; the propositions of Government for the abolition of minor duties had been thrown out in a full House by a decided majority—295 to 256.

He turned to the speeches. After Mr. Blink and Mr. Blank *et hoc omne genus*, had had their say, Mr. Jardine arose—

"Mr. Speaker, I have long hesitated to offer any remarks on the proposal before us; and it is only after the most careful consideration that I now venture to trouble the House with a few words in respect to it. I feel that the observations I am about to make, and the decision that I

have come to, will probably expose me to some animadversion; and, therefore, I trust that if I appear hesitating or undecided some allowance will be made for my peculiar position. The proposal before us is to lower considerably, and in some cases to abolish altogether, a variety of minor imposts—is it necessary? is it expedient? is it useful? In the first place, as to its need. No one will, I think, assert for an instant that the measure has been forced on us by the general state of the nation or of trade. The nation, I venture to say, for the most part does not know even the names of many of these articles; and, as to trade, the reduction or total abolition of the tax on any of them will not add a tithe to its consumption. Take the case of ‘succession powder.’ A few years ago it brought in nearly £20,000 a year; but, since the establishment of the Divorce Court, this has barely averaged £8,000. This is in the judgment of many, with whom I agree, a preparation which might with advantage to the community be entirely dispensed with, and, therefore, could not be too highly charged. The Government, however, think differently. They do not, having respect to the

advisability of restricting its sale to certain authorised parties, wish to remove the tax altogether; but to lower it to a nominal amount. This policy I cannot support. If dues are to be remitted, let them be remitted from the food of the lowest classes—that part of the revenue which the wealthy bear, especially that part which is derived from the, even to them, totally needless luxuries of modern life, may, perhaps, also be lightened—though I question it—but certainly not in the mode now under consideration. Then, there are the duties on coats of arms and signet rings, £5,050; on hair powder, £250; on the privilege of employing running footmen, £300; on the import of turtles, edible bird's nests, and other materials of food—of the higher class, that is—£2,700. . . . These amount to a gross total of £9,700 a year. This sum is derived from articles utterly useless; their price will not be lowered one farthing by sweeping it away—why then do so? . . . Especially would I say a few words on the reasoning that has been brought forward in support of the abolition of the 1s. per ton at present levied on the export of coal. Many uphold it on the broad ground of

free trade. Such a defence it is very difficult for one like myself to attempt to impugn ; but to these uncompromising advocates of a grand and most valuable doctrine—one that has revolutionised modern trade and wrought incalculable good, not only to this country, but to the whole world—one that has attained a recognition unlooked for in the most sanguine dreams of its early apostles, and is breaking down year by year the walls of partition that separate peoples—to these I would put the question—are you assured that your principles may not, under certain circumstances, be pushed somewhat too far? Must not the stringency of a wide, general rule be now and then relaxed to meet particular cases? Our minerals are the very backbone of the nation. Whatever of them is removed cannot be replaced—once taken away, they are gone for ever ; and, with their disappearance, disappears our proud pre-eminence. Carefully considering this, would it not be well to employ them at home as much as possible? Indeed, we require for our own purposes a quantity of coal and iron annually increasing—a quantity which the mind cannot grasp, which is measured not by hundreds

or thousands, but by millions of tons, which has been more than trebled in the last quarter of a century, and which must itself rapidly produce the exhaustion of the supplies still remaining. On the broad grounds—the vital grounds rather—of self-preservation, I maintain that the withdrawal of coal from this kingdom to feed the manufactures and the commerce of our rivals should be restricted, if not absolutely prohibited. But the majority who have spoken in favour of the abolition base their argument on a fallacy so gross as to be well-nigh inconceivable. My right hon. friend, the Minister of Finance, apparently takes the same view—I say apparently, for, though I am aware his severe intellect seldom allows him to join in a joke, yet in this I can with difficulty credit his seriousness. We are told that the taking off the 1s. per ton will lower the price of coal by the same amount in the home market. The assertion is preposterous. On what is it based? My coal merchant has 1,000 tons in his yard—it makes no difference to him whether I or a Frenchman pay him a guinea a ton for his article. The Frenchman has also to pay 1s. to the custom-house. If this be re-

moved, he will get his coals—not I mine—at so much the less price. There will be no possible means by which the cost to me will be lowered. This charge brings into the revenue about £500,000 yearly; and the whole of it comes from foreign consumers—not a farthing from our own.

. . . . Again, game licenses are to be reduced £12,000 per annum—why? On whom does this burden fall? Certainly on those well able to bear it. The charges for stamps on various documents—on peers' writs, &c.—are to be similarly lessened by £1,000. This is not much, but if the diminution is to be made at all let it be made in the Post-office. The whole of these duties last year reached £1,040,000. This is an important sum, and if it can be abolished so much the better for the state of the country. I will assume that this may be done. I think it can, the revenue shows a little revived elasticity—but can we not turn this surplus to better account? It is admitted that taxes on necessaries should first be lightened. As this is not the intention of the Ministry, they doubtless consider that reductions have gone far enough in that direction. Admitting this, I still think this

million of money may be utilised for the advantage of the poorer classes. We have just now a cry, loud, and increasing in loudness, of the slackness of employment. We hear of meetings and assemblies for the purpose of enlightening labourers as to the openings offered them in the colonies, we see philanthropic men and women exerting themselves to help on the work of emigration. Now, if this sum were directed into the same channel, it would be of the greatest assistance. Supposing £200 were allotted to each family, one-third to be given them, and the remainder lent, and supposing one out of every four could not or did not pay back the loan, thus making one-half to be actually given away, it would furnish the means of conveying to the colonies, and starting them in life, these 10,000 families yearly, or say, from 60,000 to 80,000 human beings. This removal would greatly diminish the competition amongst those who remain, and would have a wonderful effect on the poor-rates.”

The hon. gentleman was frequently interrupted with cheers and groans, according to the feelings of his hearers, but the cheers greatly predomi-

nated, and when he sat down uninterrupted applause followed for some minutes.

The Minister of Finance attempted a reply, but was heard most impatiently, his words being almost inaudible, from the continuous cries of "Divide, divide, 'vide, 'vide!"

After the announcement of the figures, Mr. Maitland, in very agitated tones, said that—

"Owing to the unforeseen occurrence he must ask for an adjournment, in order that his colleagues might decide on the course they had to pursue in the emergency. He therefore moved that the House stand adjourned till next Wednesday."

Here shouts of "The Derby!" arose from all sides. "Till next Thursday!"

From the speeches Avondale turned to the "leaders." The first contained a hasty analysis of the position of Parliament. "The Liberals in a majority of seventy defeated on one of their own measures. This is a fact that wants explanation;" and thereupon the writer proceeded to explain it. He attributed the victory partly to the unexpectedness of the attack, and to the direct weight of Mr. Jardine's opinions, partly to

defects inherent in the measure, and to its apparent neglect of the concerns of the lower classes, partly to disunion amongst the Ministry. He did not pretend to regret it, as it would place the reins of Government in the hands of some party with definite principles. And he then speculated on this party, and who would form it—speculations which, like much of the matter that encumbers newspaper columns, were worth just what any ideas are worth which a scribbler evokes off-hand from out of the depths of his consciousness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE day turned out splendid, just one of those glorious days which are to be met with at the union of spring and summer. The sun shone bright, but its rays were not insufferably hot. Not a cloud interrupted the deep blue which even a London sky occasionally assumes. May had nearly come to an end. The trees had just put on their early foliage, the earth was clad in a mantle of brightest green, the flowers were wearing their most gorgeous tints. Oh the lovely spring! How beautiful it is, how enchanting is the form in which it presents itself, how exquisite is the pleasure it affords—and yet how short-lived! Summer succeeds, hot, burning, overpowering, eager to add full fruition to the undertakings of its predecessor, and destroying them by its very impetuosity. So in life—youth commences, delighted with his task, carefully, neatly laying out the foundations of buildings fair as the fabrics that in day-dreams rise before

his view, and vast as the extent at which he estimates his own powers ; manhood completes the work, blurring its symmetry, defacing its adornments, contracting its dimensions ; manhood, despoiled of the romance that once it had, occupied with the cares of routine life, hardened by the strife for gold.

Charming were the Horticultural Society's gardens, still more charming the crowds that filled them. It was Nature's festival—she had brought from every land, and from every clime, her rarest growths, and her loveliest products. She had laid under contribution the sides of the snowy Himalayas and the uplands of di Gama's Cape ; she had robbed the trim-kept gardens of the Celestials and the boundless prairies of the red men ; and thus from her treasury she exhibited to her visitors a variety of colour, and a wealth of bloom, beyond conception. It was beauty's reunion—fairy forms thronged the tents, witching faces rivalled the loveliness of the blossoms over which they hung, dazzling eyes were glittering around, the most fascinating of every age were met together. Could love be absent from the throng ?

The Jardines were there, with Walter Avondale. His countenance showed unmistakably the pleasure he was receiving. Mary Jardine was equally delighted.

“There is Mrs. Peppercorn—do you know her, Mr. Avondale?”

“Not personally, I am glad to say. She is a regular termagant, leads her husband a frightful life.”

“How do you know? I thought you never repeated the common gossip.”

“Well, I hope I don’t slander her. Look what a fine—what is it?—something like a lily. Almost as enchanting as the divinity standing near it.”

“Dear me, how complimentary you suddenly have become. I will tell Maud Redcliffe when we get round to her.”

“So do—she will be delighted—gets but few compliments.”

“That is too bad—it isn’t the truth. How grand Lady Diddleham appears to day.”

“Yes, extremely so—and how grand her husband, considering he is but the sixth.”

“For shame. You are thoroughly scurrilous

to-day. I have a great mind to take you over to Mrs. Simpkins."

"Oh, don't, please; she has half-a-dozen daughters—yes, and the whole bevy are here—and not a single person with them. It would be the height of cruelty. I should not get out of her clutches the rest of the afternoon. But here is the Marquis of Wharfedale coming. He owes your papa something for last night's work."

The Marquis came up with his wife. He was a well-built man, about 40 years of age, not particularly handsome or intellectual, but endued with the grace of a man of the world, and the pleasing address of an English nobleman. The Marchioness was ten years younger; a fine, stately woman, in the full bloom of female perfection. She was of the oldest patrician descent, being the younger daughter of the Duke of Hants. Avondale drew back, while the salutations were being made. These over, the Marquis, as soon as he conveniently could, drew Mr. Jardine behind the ladies.

"My dear sir, you have taken a wonderful responsibility upon you. It is a terrible uproar which your speech and its result have made.

Why, we shall all have to go out, and the Queen will send for you."

"No, my lord, not quite that. But I certainly did greater things than I anticipated."

"So I imagine; but that does not alter the fact. What are we to do?"

"That I cannot say. I should not be surprised to hear you were all in a state of perplexity. It is, I presume, really, though not avowedly, a case of Radical versus Liberal—and the former has the advantage."

"Yes, I dare say that is about the truth. I suppose we shall see for some months—it won't last longer—a crucial experiment as to the vitality of our constitution. Meanwhile some of us must remain out in the cold."

"Have you seen any of your colleagues? Gar-mouth, for instance, what will he do?"

"He called on me this morning. He had not then been able to come to a fixed determination, though I believe he will not attempt to retain the premiership. I saw, too, Kerr—he seemed pleased rather than the reverse. He will, probably, go out, if only to have the pleasure of pitching into Maitland without restraint. Of course there will

be one or two others who will follow—Williams, for instance, and, perhaps, Edmunds.”

“Yes, I think you are right, but who will take their places?”

“That is the rub. I don’t know any more than yourself, and very probably not as much. There is Sloe—Maitland would like to buy his following by putting him into the post he vacates, but it would be a very questionable stroke of policy. The gain might not be counterbalanced by the loss.”

“A new Chancellor, too, will be required, and, likely enough, Sir Edward Pilgrim will give up—who is to supply their places?”

“Very doubtful. Eastbourne would do, but then it can’t be. His being Keeper of the King’s conscience was always bad enough, but, after recent revelations, it would be an insult to common honesty. The Chief Baron Repton, I suppose, will be promoted, and the Solicitor-General take his office. Then FitzHenry could be Attorney-General—he would not serve as junior member under Claybourne.”

“No, nor take anything from such a medley as Maitland will get together. He has an im-

mense practice, half of which, I dare say, would be lost to him as Attorney-General, and if he were to lose the dignity, too, at the end of seven or eight months, he would make a poor bargain."

"Just so. He would do much better by waiting till the 'king gets his own again.' But I have heard a whisper that some temptation has been held out to you."

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no—I cannot myself positively say; but you know me well enough to be assured I am not a Republican."

"I hope not. By the by, I must congratulate you on the speech. It reads remarkably well. You must have carefully prepared it."

"No; there was no preparation. In truth, my decision to deliver, was chiefly influenced by a young friend of mine. You must allow me to introduce him. He has first-rate abilities and great energy. He is just now looking out for a seat, and when he gets into the House will, I trust, soon make his mark there."

The speaker turned round for Avondale. He was a few yards off, chattering and laughing with Mary Jardine, and some mutual acquaint-

ances. At Mr. Jardine's beckoning, he came forward, and was presented to the peer.

"Avondale—Avondale. Excuse me, but have I not had the pleasure of hearing your name before?"

"Your lordship, perhaps, has heard of my grandfather—an M.P. at the beginning of this century, who was rather too well known for his conviviality."

"Yes, of course I have. Are you his grandson? I am sure it increases the pleasure of your acquaintance. From what I remember of his doings, I think few men could have had a wider circle of connections, and there are many to whom it will be a delight to commence intercourse with one of his family."

"Your lordship is too kind. I had no idea my relative was so—may I say celebrated? My father has been almost silent to me with respect to him."

"Is your father then alive? I am surprised he does not frequent town."

"My father's estate, my lord, was very much reduced, compared with what it had been when it came into his hands."

“And you must restore it. Mr. Jardine tells me that you are anxious to figure in Parliament—you may command my influence. But, Jardine, you must excuse me, there is a Cabinet Council on directly. Allow me first to introduce you, Mr. Avondale, to Lady Wharfedale. She will be much pleased with the acquisition to her circle.”

At this moment the Earl of Wyversley joined them. All three saluted him with great cordiality.

“What,” said Wharfedale, who was one of his trustees, “do you know our young friend?”

“Yes, sir, for some long time past.”

“I am glad of it; he will, I hope, keep you out of mischief. It is very fortunate you are here. I am compelled to run away. Lady Wharfedale will not wish to leave—may I ask you to attend her?”

His lordship led Avondale up to the Marchioness.

“Alice, I have made quite a discovery. This is Mr. Avondale, a relative of the gentleman who figured so conspicuously in the Regency days.”

Her ladyship gave Avondale a gracious smile, and expressed her interest at the information.

“He is ambitious, Jardine says. You must criticise him; and, let me see, give him an invitation for your next Friday’s reception. Pardon my unconscionable haste, but I cannot stay—you know I am engaged—and I leave you in good custody, Wyversley promises to supply my place.”

He raised his hat to the ladies generally, bowed to Mrs. Jardine in particular, nodded to Avondale, and took his departure.

They loitered on through the grounds, meeting friends and encountering acquaintances in every direction. Such numbers were present—all London, in fact, had turned out—that motion if desired had been impossible, but thereby only the better opportunity was given for conversation. Wyversley bestowed his attention more especially to Mrs. Jardine’s daughters. Mr. Jardine did not shine as a drawing-room knight, so that the care of Lady Wharfedale fell to Avondale. He succeeded to admiration. Indeed, when not preoccupied or under the influence of the constitutional melancholy he inherited from his father, he had ever been distinguished for the charm and vivacity of his manner. To-day, in addition to his innate

liveliness he had every incentive to appear his best. Affairs were shaping themselves as though his own hand were guiding them; full success had attended his first attempt, the weather was exhilarating, the company was most brilliant, and of that company, one of the most stately and attractive women was his companion. Jest, wit, amusing observation on the world's ways, sarcastic remarks on its failings, succeeded each other in quick succession. The Marchioness was gratified, pleased, captivated. There was a freshness, a piquance, a glitter, and yet withal a depth, a reality, a substance about Avondale that formed a wonderful attraction.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt Tracy came by, and stopped to exchange compliments.

"Do you know them? You have a large number of friends."

"Not many, Lady Wharfedale. I have seen the Tracys a few times at Mr. Jardine's."

"You are very intimate there?"

"Rather. I was fortunate enough to do Stuart Jardine a service at College, and so, since I have come to town, they have welcomed me most heartily to their house."

“And you know Wyversley, too. I should be so glad if you could get him to turn his thoughts to real work. Have you been long acquainted with him? You must have very great influence over young men of your own age.”

“You pay me such a compliment that I almost doubt its sincerity.”

“Oh no, I never flatter. I met him first, about two years since, just after he had left Oriel. Where is he? It is really too bad of him to run away from me like this. I shall tell him he is a recreant knight.”

There was a sudden and rapid diminution of the people around, and a rush to one tent.

“Dear me! What great catastrophe is it, Mr. Avondale?”

“Probably the Royal Family. Our middle class, with the innate boorishness that characterises them, take the first opportunity they get of mobbing anything new. No matter what it is, man or animal, animate or inanimate, the Prince of Wales, His Majesty of Dahomey, Rajah Brooke, the Chief Apostle of the Mormons, a new species of ape, or a Maori's cooking apparatus, they all crowd round, and gape and stare, and make their

horribly vulgar remarks—it is perfectly abominable.”

“ You are quite excited. But what is the middle class ; where do you draw the line ; would it include yourself, for instance ? ”

“ If it did, that would not alter the fact ; but I fancy I should scarcely come under the designation as commonly interpreted. My lineage can probably be traced back as far as that of the House of Wharfedale, or Hants. An Avondale fought at Hastings, and they have since taken part in every civil war, and in almost every battle in England. Many times have we been offered a peerage.”

“ Indeed ! I am rejoiced to hear it. But I merely meant to raise an objection to the indiscriminate, unqualified contempt so often thrown against that class, which is, with all its failings, the mainstay of the nation.”

“ I should be very sorry to traduce them. There are, of course, many exceptions to what I said, but it is not the less true that the business part of the community, the wealth-getting class *par excellence*, are singularly without refinement, as compared with their neighbours of the same

standing on the Continent. Their thoughts are so thoroughly absorbed in the one idea, that they never perceive the want of polish and cultivation till it is too late to acquire it."

"And there is much excuse for them. You forget how intense is the strife for existence in the present day. Unless a person is born to fortune, no matter what his connections, he must enter into the competition which is daily becoming fiercer."

"You astonish me. The woman's movement has certainly gained a most valuable auxiliary."

"Oh no, not at all."

Here Wyversley joined them.

"Well, sir, have you not been a most gallant cavalier? I scarcely know how most fittingly to tender you thanks for the pleasure your company has afforded me."

"I must humbly crave pardon. I—I—I—I will—I cannot express my contrition; but Avondale is such an attractive attendant that if I had remained, he would have cut me out altogether. I should have been snubbed, or at least quietly consigned to utter oblivion."

"Do you hear him, Mr. Avondale? What

shall be done to him? His coolness and presumption pass belief. He first feigns compunction for his fault, and then extenuates it."

"Send him back to his late charge, or introduce him to the charming Mrs. Simpkins. Do you see her—the person just opposite, with the flaming bonnet-strings, surrounded by a whole bevy of nymphs? They are her daughters, half-a-dozen in number, if they are all here, as is pretty certain to be the case."

"Oh, yes. You know the lady, Mr. Avondale—take him across, you have my full permission."

"But not mine though," ejaculated the object of the proposal. "Your plebeian grandees are all very well in their way, but I must be excused. That elderly personage, I will be bound, Avondale, is the partner, so they style it, of some grocer or tallow-chandler, no doubt a most excellent individual."

"Yes, I believe Mr. Samuel Simpkins is a general dealer, whatever it may be, in the city, wherever that is. He is an alderman, an anomalous dignitary, whose greatness chiefly lies in his official robes, very much resembling those

which, perhaps, Lady Wharfedale has seen some beadles wearing."

"For shame, Mr. Avondale. I will not listen to you."

"He is also M.P. for Dirty-lucres, in East Anglia—an enterprising person, it will be allowed. It is, however, reported that it was his ambitious partner who, for the sake of the girls, made him do this. The election cost him £7,000, and a petition was talked of, but both sides were in the same predicament. He is a Dissenter, almost inevitably; and he is a steadfast Liberal. In the House he is somewhat of a bore, and has a propensity to discard the H, as superfluous in most words where it is usually pronounced, and to stick it on where not wanted. He was to have been presented last year, and went through a series of lessons on deportment; but the task was beyond his powers—the sword would get between his legs and pitch him on his nose as he went forward, and pitch him the reverse way as he backed out. As one consequence of his failure, the rumour goes that Maitland is trying to get the Court dress abolished *in toto*."

"If ever he is introduced to me," said the

Marchioness, "I will report to him the slanders you have been uttering."

"If he does not hear of them till the introduction takes place, I need not be under any fear. Poor man, he could never face the appearance of so much splendour and beauty."

"You are incorrigible, sir. Reginald, may I ask in whose custody you left your late charge?"

"Mr. Renshall took them. He is a clergyman, and rather a particular friend of Miss Jardine's."

Lady Thanet and her husband sailed by, receiving from Lady Wharfedale, and returning her, especially the lady, a very distant bend.

"Mr. Percy Mulgrave is rather an intimate friend of Maitland's, is he not?" enquired Wyversley.

"So it is commonly reported. He is probably hoping to transform his Under-Secretaryship into a seat in the new Cabinet."

"Is he—why? He is generally considered a noodle. What has he done?" enquired Wyversley.

"Do you ask why?" said Avondale. "Has he not married—well—his present wife? and is she

not the most intriguing woman in England, Lady Barnet not excepted? And as to his being a noodle, Wyversley, why, you must be aware that if Maitland is to be Premier he will have ability enough for the whole Ministry, and will rather seek colleagues without such a qualification."

"Slandering again, Mr. Avondale," said the Marchioness.

"And am I not correct?" rejoined the offender.

"There is Mr. FitzHenry, Reginald. He won't look this way; go and tell him where to find me."

Wyversley went off on his errand as fast as the press would allow him.

"He has splendid talents and abilities. My husband says he will certainly be Lord Chancellor. He is a most persuasive speaker—I have heard him once or twice. I must introduce you."

"You are very kind, but I do not think I need trouble you."

"What! You acquainted with them too? You seem to know almost every one. I have seen you nodding to at least fifty people this

afternoon. Here is Mr. Jardine making his way back again."

"I must apologise," said that gentleman. "But we became separated suddenly, I don't know how; though I trust Mr. Avondale has not failed to enliven you—he is a capital entertainer."

"You are as bad as Wyversley, sir; though, in consideration of your great effort last night, I presume I must be lenient."

Wyversley now returned with Mr. FitzHenry, and for some minutes much badinage went flying about. Mr. Jardine especially received the lawyer's compliments on his speech. He was ironically asked what would be his next proceedings—whether he had yet received the Queen's command; and, if so, whether all the offices were yet filled up.

The subject took it all in good-humour, but declared he was not altogether responsible for it. His young friend had been to some extent the originator of his action; and to him some of the credit or the blame, whichever might be awarded, must be attributed.

"Mr. Avondale again!" exclaimed the Mar-

chioness. "He appears to be a perfect genius."

"We shall have him, some fine day," added FitzHenry, "astonishing the whole world, like the bursting forth of a brilliant star. Speaking seriously, however, we must get him into Parliament, if possible. And why do you not turn your attention to politics?"

"So I suppose I shall, some day," said Wyversley; "but who, when such scenes as this tempt him from work, would choose to immure himself within the walls of a Senate House?"

Once again the conversation turned to the company around. It was, indeed, a fascinating scene—one that would have withdrawn a hermit from his cell, or a saint from his oratory. Each felt and accepted the influence of its attractions; each gave himself unreservedly up to enjoyment. So the time flew by. When Lady Wharfedale withdrew, Avondale acknowledged that he had spent a most delightful day; and he could not doubt that he had made the impression he had laboured to do.

CHAPTER XII.

SUNDAY came and passed—a *dies non* as far as open negotiation was concerned, but none the less actively was it carried on in secret. Political plotting knows neither time nor place, neither pause nor stop. Those engaged in it can scarcely venture to snatch a moment's breathing time, much less to relinquish their efforts, even for an instant. The fight is too close, the combatants too well matched. Hand to hand the struggle goes on continuously, each side carefully watching for an opening, each eager to take full advantage of the slightest weakness of an opponent, each ready, on the least appearance of faltering, to charge home. Were it not thus, whence were the interest derived? 'Tis not the overthrow of a miserable obstructor that the true soldier seeks for. What satisfaction, what enjoyment, springs from such a success? When the odds are all against one, when approved foes with-

stand, when the battle is for the reins of our country's government, and when our fellow-citizens are looking on—then it is the nerves are strengthened, the courage excited to its highest point, and the real manhood of a man tested. Victory in such a contest affords unqualified pleasure, defeat is hardly less glorious.

On all hands, it was clear that a crisis had arisen, and as yet but the vaguest opinions and guesses were put forth as to how it would end. Nothing definite could yet be known. The two or three Sunday journals, never, fortunately, in this country, of much consideration, had not been able to add much to the general information. They could report that a Council, attended by all the Cabinet, had yesterday been held in Downing Street, and that was all—a fact of which everybody had become well aware on the previous evening. People had no resource but to proceed to their customary places of worship, and to moderate their impatience till at least the next day.

Avondale usually attended the Temple Church. In religion, as in politics, he held very mixed ideas. Creeds he thoroughly discountenanced,

true piety he as thoroughly respected. Yet as he upheld the necessity, at least in the present state of advancement and morality of the human race, of a national form of worship, he saw no means of abolishing articles of faith and doctrine. He had been brought up as an orthodox Churchman by his father, who had ever been attached to the Church of England, though, apart from prior impressions, he had, from genuine love for the purity and simplicity of her formularies and from deep conviction in the excellence of her influence, become a firm, not blind, adherent of her. A cathedral service he admired; but for the childish mummeries and the wretched vagaries of the Ritualists he ever expressed profound contempt. Indeed, if he felt greater dislike of the Romish religion herself, it was only because he considered it at bottom political, and not merely theological, because he not only loathed but dreaded the spread of its doctrines, because all history told him that, like a polluting upas tree, it had blasted and withered every country in which it had been planted, and because he imagined—needlessly, perhaps—that of late years it had showed increased vitality in his own land.

Liberal as were his views on matters of belief, yet with the sickening cant which, under the shade of similar liberality, pretends to discard all varieties of faith as being derogatory to the greatness of human intellect, and sets up in its stead a license of thought tenfold more degrading even than Romish bigotry or sanctimonious Puritanism—with this he had not the slightest sympathy.

Many reasons concurred to make him an attendant at the Temple Church. The building itself is a magnificent edifice, carrying one's thoughts back many centuries in the course of time. Few, or none, ever enter it without being affected by its imposing grandeur, its awe-inspiring solemnity, its subdued solitude. The shades of the dead seem even now to be flitting about. The crusaders who are buried in it, the preachers who have filled its pulpit, the generations of jurists who have worshipped there, all in turn pass before the mind's eye. Remembrance of the past never fails to arouse some emotions in the mind of even the most unimpressible; and here the very service smacks of antiquity—the bidding prayer for “God's

blessing on all seminaries of learning and especially on the two Temples," the locking of the doors after the anthem, the collection of hymns and anthems, the mellow organ, all remind us of times gone by. Avondale never entered this house of God without experiencing a removal from the occupations of every-day life, and never left it without acknowledging the soothing effects of its calmness and repose.

CHAPTER XIII.

MONDAY and Tuesday followed — Ministerial flittings backward and forward — this every one knew as well as the papers — but nothing definitely settled.

Tuesday evening, Avondale, with his three friends, Jardine, Wyversley, and Talbot, according to their arrangement, paid a visit to the Clair Street Maison d'Or. Clair Street is just off Regent Street, with which it is parallel, and with which it is connected by a narrow thoroughfare. It is itself out of the route of cabs and omnibuses; and, not being much frequented by foot passengers, it wears a look of quietness and respectability.

As they were going to it, Jardine enquired of Avondale how it was that such a well-known gaming-house could exist under the present law?

“My dear fellow, you must not ask incon-

venient questions. I do not know much about it. Jackson keeps it as quiet as he can ; and the outside has such an irreproachable air that none not in the secret would have the least suspicion."

"I suppose not. I have often been down the street, but have not the least idea which is the house."

"Very probably. And as to the police, you must be aware that 3s. 6d. a day is not a very large sum wherewith to secure the honesty of a heterogeneous body of men."

They passed by a chemist's shop, and entered a tobacconist's situated next. No one but the attendant was in it. He knew both Talbot and Avondale ; and, after a few words from these, admitted them into a small room leading out of the shop. Here they found another person, lazily scanning the evening paper. Another explanation, and they passed into a dark passage ; but, as the door closed behind them, a bell rang, at the further end apparently, and a lamp, revolving, threw a clear, brilliant light upon them

Stepping down the passage, Avondale stopped under the light which came through an oval

piece of glass, fitted near the ceiling, in the top of what seemed to be a door. He turned a handle, the light again disappeared, leaving them in darkness, and the door opened. A gloomy-looking room was before them. Into it they entered, Talbot placing three crowns in the hands of a dissipated-looking individual, who acted as doorkeeper. Another room received them; and for a few minutes Jardine felt half-blinded by the glare of many lights. It was a long chamber, of considerable height and width, shaped like the letter L, being much wider at one end, and for two-thirds of the way down, than at the other. On all the walls were full-length mirrors, reflecting again and again every figure that fell on them. From the ceiling, which was superbly decorated, hung three enormous chandeliers, containing from thirty to forty burners each; and under each was placed a fine mahogany table. By the walls were fixed luxurious couches; and on them, between the pier glasses, were fastened engravings and paintings of a fair degree of excellence. The whole appearance struck Jardine with astonishment, which his eyes plainly expressed.

“*Mon cher ami, comment le trouvez-vous?*” said Avondale.

“I—I hardly can say. But I certainly had not the least idea such places were still to be found in London.”

“Charming innocence. A good number of fellows here, too.”

“Yes, the Derby, to-morrow, is partly the cause. Not a few are, probably, country cousins.”

The room was well filled, all the tables being occupied. One of them was devoted to roulette, another to rouge et noir, and the third, which stood back by itself, to cards and dice. Many of those present Jardine recognised, and several who were disengaged came forward to welcome him and Avondale.

“Thought, Avondale, you had gone out of the world,” drawled the Honourable Stanley Carlton, an empty-headed son of as empty-headed a father.

“Don’t tell crams, Carlton. You find thinking such a labour, that I am sure I should never be the subject of it.”

“Going to give me my revenge at billiards

to-night?" asked a youth with good-humoured, plebeian face. "It is seven or eight weeks since you gave me that beating."

He was the eldest son of Mr. Richard Hardman, one of our coal and iron millionaires. Mr. Hardman had worked his way from "Dick," the odd-boy at the colliery, who cleaned the office, ran on errands, and did a hundred others jobs at fourpence a day, to be Richard Hardman, Esq., C.E., M.P. for Coalford, of which borough he owned half the houses, and employed nine-tenths of the voters. He had iron-works and coal-mines in the North of England and in South Wales; he had made two or three branch railway lines, but preferred to turn out from his works the rolling stock by which the traffic is carried on. He had commenced life as a Radical, but, like all men when they make a fortune, he was now a Tory, and was gravitating towards a baronetcy. Wishing his son to go into good society, he allowed him unlimited supplies of money for that purpose, and the young man dutifully carried out his desires, at least to the extent of spending his wealth.

To his question Avondale replied that he

would be happy to join in a game with him presently if a table were vacant ; and to Talbot, who interposed with—

“ Don’t forget your engagement to me ”—

“ No ! of course not ; I am too fond of your sovs, Talbot, to miss the opportunity of plucking you.”

“ That you, Avondale ? ” asked a young man, about his own age—Aubrey, Marquis of Brayclift, a young nobleman, early left, like Wyversley, an orphan, and now far on the road along which the Earl was proposing to follow. “ That you, Avondale ? It sounds like your voice, and very much like your cheek. When are you going to pluck Talbot ? ”

“ Directly ; come and watch. Perhaps you could give me a hint how the operation is best and most expeditiously performed.”

Several laughed, but Brayclift took the allusion in good part.

“ I feel the operation, Avondale ; but really cannot tell how it is performed. I was never curious to investigate the process. Perhaps Tom Lewis could elucidate the difficulty ? ”

Lewis had been smiling at Avondale’s reply ;

there was now a more general and a louder laugh at his expense, for he was one of those waifs and strays of society who, though not exactly blacklegs, are obliged to eke out a subsistence by utilising the follies and the indiscretions of other men.

“Jardine too!” continued Brayclift. “You ought to know better than this. I am almost inclined to ask you if your revered parent knows you are out.”

“Don’t trouble about him, Stuart,” said Avondale; “he has got a few thousands on Star of Dawn, and is overjoyed because she has gone down only from 3 to 1 to 10 to 1. As a rule, he lays when it’s 2 to 1 on, and a week or so later the odds are 20 to 1 against. Is not that the case, Brayclift? Come on, Stuart. The billiard-tables are down in the lower regions, in order that the click of the balls may not be heard in the street.”

“There! how do you like the look?”

The room they had reached was somewhat longer than the chamber overhead, and it was the full width all the way down. Eight tables were in it, two fine branch gaseliers hanging

over each, the whole of the light being thrown by proper shades on the tables, all of which were then occupied.

“The very man,” exclaimed a voice, as Avondale entered. “Here, Avondale, what am I to do? I am forty-six; Grey two behind. Look at those balls and at mine—all three in a line, and Grey is sure to run out next hand.”

“Pot the red, and screw off it to the cushion, and back and kiss white.”

“Pot the red! What next? And whoever heard of screwing from one side of the table to the other?”

“My dear Wyversley, don’t first ask advice and then grumble at it. If you can’t do that, play off the first ball against the farther cushion, then to the side below the middle pocket, back here, and then back to the second ball. But that is all round the world to Westminster, and is, besides, much harder.”

“Fair play, Avondale,” objected Grey. “Don’t coach him too much.”

“The advice, I fear, is thrown away,” said his opponent; “but here goes.”

He made a careful shot; the ball followed as if

by instinct the route marked out by Avondale, and finally cannoned, while a shout of applause rewarded coach and pupil. But the latter could do no more, both balls being under the cushion. He merely knocked one out for Grey, who was thus enabled to win.

Avondale and Hardman played the next game, which soon ended in favour of the former, as did the succeeding one between Avondale and Talbot. Hardman would then try again, but asked for twenty, out of a hundred.

“You gave it me last time, but I thought I was improved now.”

“Give him thirty,” said Wyversley.

“If you will recoup me in case of defeat.”

“Willingly, if Hardman will make it a fiver.”

The stakes were deposited. Hardman gave the miss, and Avondale wiped off fifteen.

“Well done, well done!” exclaimed Wyversley.

“Make it a tener, Hardman?”

This was assented to. Hardman added two, and Avondale ten. Then the former had several good breaks, and the latter bad ones, till the score was eighty-five to sixty, when Avondale, by fine play, made it even. Hardman increased

his to ninety, and left his own ball under the cushion one side, the red one nearly opposite, just above the middle pocket, and Avondale's in baulk.

"'Throw' up the sponge, Avondale," said Grey, "a crown you don't score."

"Make it sovs?"

"No; but I will lay a single one."

"Good."

Avondale's ball just touched the red one, passed on gently to the cushion, and, hugging it closely, rolled on to the corner pocket.

"You deserve that sov," said Grey, handing it over. "I bet any one else the same coin he wins; or I will take two to one he wins off this break."

"Done," exclaimed Brayclift; "two to one."

The red ball had rolled back a little more in front of the middle pocket.

"You can't screw it in," said Brayclift, "unless there is magic in your cue."

Avondale played sharp. The red ball rebounded from the cushion into the opposite middle pocket, while his own, impinging from the end of the table, cannoned against his oppo-

ment's. The onlookers were astounded. A few more strokes and Grey had pocketed his two sovereigns.

"I'll take 3 to 1," said Brayclift, "that Avondale beats Hardman, giving him two strokes to one."

"I'll give 5 to 2," said Hardman.

"Taken."

"I go you halves, Brayclift," said Avondale.

The game was short. Avondale had but four breaks. The first took him to twenty-seven, the next to sixty-one, including thirteen cannons; the next to seventy-three, and the fourth out, Hardman being just ten behind. A quartett was next formed; Stuart Jardine and Wyversley against Talbot and Brayclift. That over, Avondale and Jardine went up-stairs again. The room now was crowded even more than before. Gambling of every description was in full swing; the dice-boxes kept up a constant rattle; by the roulette table was wedged a ring of eager gazers; in all directions bets were freely being made upon the coming race. All were talking loudly, most were in that peculiar state known as a "little fresh."

Jardine was somewhat amused at the scene.

“ Cambridge and old Rablyn’s slightly heightened,” suggested Avondale.

“ Very like it, save that his rooms were but a very tenth-rate imitation of this. How the place is crammed !”

“ Rather too much so—more than I have ever seen here before. It is rather risky admitting so many.”

“ So I should imagine. Half of these fellows are thoroughly tight, but they are betting wild and playing high. It’s ‘youth at the prow and pleasure—’ ”

“ The devil, you mean, ‘at the helm.’ Hardly one fellow you see here but is born to either a noble name or wealth that his father has scraped together—is this the life, the training, think you, to fit them for the work destined for them ? Look at those we left below—Brayclift, Talbot, Hardman, a sapient trio. Look at that classic face ; do you know its owner ?—the only son of his mother, Mrs. Wardelle, the end of his line. That youth away in the corner, with three others round him—do you know him ? A Duke in whose veins flows the blood of two royal houses—Our

Right Trusty and Right Entirely Well-beloved Cousin Glenlivet. Pah! there will be a mighty upheaving within a year or two, which will rid us of Right Trustys and Beloveds, and other such Humbugs, and few will regret the riddance."

"Well, Walter," exclaimed Jardine and Wyversley, who heard the end of the speech, laughing, "you are perfectly incomprehensible. You come here and grumble at others who do the same, and that you cannot aver that their motives are altogether unlike your own. May not a man once or twice in the year blow off steam without thereby incurring your righteous indignation?"

"Never mind. We won't argue the matter now. I will some other evening, if you like. Let's join in here—some have, apparently, just finished. Can you find room for us, Dawson?" addressing that gentleman, who was shuffling a pack of cards given up by the party leaving the table. They soon arranged themselves, tried several games in succession, till Avondale rose.

"I object to late hours, Stuart—let's be off—it's past one."

Wyversley came with them.

“What has made you leave so early?” asked Avondale, astonished.

“The charm of your company, my dear fellow.”

“Dear me—very flattering. Going to Epsom, of course, to-morrow? Any one with you?”

“Stansville.”

“Stansville? I did not know he was in town. By the by, Glenlivet was looking somewhat glum.”

“Very probable. He has gone in heavily on Star of Dawn, and, pending the race, thinks of turning his house in Scotland into a joint-stock distillery, and of migrating for a term to Hongkong or Nova Zembla.”

“Wish him luck, but he had better wait till next year, and Brayclift will be ready to be his *compagnon de voyage*.”

“I wonder you did not add myself. I have been let in for £5,000 by Star of Dawn, but I hope to recoup a little of it.”

CHAPTER XIV.

WEDNESDAY came, and brought with it some positive information as to the Government. The Earl of Garmouth and the Marquis of Wharfedale had resigned—so much was certain. The former was, of course, to be succeeded by Mr. Maitland, but it appeared not yet settled who should fill the latter's post. The "Times" mentioned Lord Tintern as the most likely candidate. He was the eldest son of the Earl of Usk, had been in Parliament a dozen years, and was at present one of the Under-Secretaries for the Home Department. This was also the choice of the "Morning Mercury," while the poor "Constitutional" contented itself with asserting that "incapable as the Marquis had been, he, probably, was superior to any one remaining in the Liberal ranks."

This appointment filled up, there was a still more dubious question to be decided—the Home

Office. This is a department more exacting than any other in its claims on the person filling it. He finds it simply impossible to please everybody. He is constantly in direct contact at innumerable points with his fellow-subjects, and therefore cannot, by the most careful steering, keep clear of all offence. He is, too, in many respects, a most anomalous individual. Though void of all legal training, he has to act in criminal cases as a final court of appeal—an arrangement peculiar to our English Constitution. In matters concerning police, the preservation of the public peace, and so on, he is a species of dictator. Maitland had discharged his duties pretty fairly to the general satisfaction, though not a few of his decisions seemed to have been arrived at after a process of deliberation familiarly known as “tossing.” Who should follow him? The “Times” said Sir George Edmunds. He had been an excellent President of the Colonial Board, had had long experience in administration, and was endowed with many of the qualifications peculiarly requisite for the office to which it was proposed to transfer him.

True enough, but it would be equally difficult

to replace him, and our connections at that period with the Colonies were in a delicate state. The "Mercury" could not form any idea on the subject; it "merely chronicled a rumour that Mr. C. Wilkins Arundel, at present Under-Secretary for War, would be promoted to a seat in the Cabinet, and that he would be succeeded by the Honble. Mordaunt Tracy, already well known for his experience at various courts on the Continent." The "Constitutional" knew nothing, and troubled less, about the appointment; but "as doubtless, in any Ministry presided over by Mr. Maitland, incapacity and obstinacy would be amply rewarded, they presumed that Mr. Percy Mulgrave would be removed from the Foreign Office to the vacancy." This paper also gave free circulation to the report, passed over in silence by both its contemporaries, that the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General would decline to retain their posts; and it contained a doleful lament on the destruction that was impending over Holy Church, if its bishops should die off while the nomination of fresh ones lay in Mr. Maitland's hands.

"Rather a remarkable coincidence," ruminated

Avondale, "the one Tracy named yesterday for a bishopric, the other to-day for office. It may be nothing more, but he would doubt it. And what has suddenly become of our friend Sloe? He has all at once dropped out of notice."

He got a copy of the "Pioneer," the organ of that personage's party. He found an article on the topic he wished, but it contained little news. It congratulated Mr. Maitland on having at length achieved the goal of his desires; trusted that he would take every opportunity of associating with him men of ability and enlightenment, and that they would labour earnestly to increasing the welfare of the land; then went into an account of the various measures requiring immediate attention; and finally wound up by saying that numbers would be rejoiced to hear that Mr. Jonathan Sloe was in favour of the new Government, though they feared that, from his proclaimed dislike to fettering himself, he would hesitate to submit to the trammels of office. Altogether it was very moderate, compared with the usual tone of its productions.

But the second leader more than compensated

for its want of ferocity. This, supplemental, apparently, to one of the preceding day, was a bitter, uncompromising, malignant attack on the Church. The career of the late Bishop of Doncaster supplied it with a text—as, indeed, it well might—but its abuse went even beyond the bounds of decency. Making no allowance for the very many excellent divines in the Church, taking not the slightest notice of what in times past it has done for the greatness of this country, it hurled at it every charge that sectarian malice or a renegade's venom could devise, characterising its ritual as a farce, and its doctrine as a stigma on the science of the day, styling its dignitaries political time-servers, and its inferior ministers ignorant bigots, and declaring it to be the great stumbling-stone in the way of improvement and progress.

“Quite enough for one issue,” thought Avondale. “If Sloe does get into the Ministry, and those are his sentiments, the Scarlet Lady of England may begin to put her house in order; though it is doubtful which is the more certain mode of attack, open and unreserved like this, or

insidious and in secret, by raising such men as Tracy to high positions in it."

His musings were interrupted by Stuart Jardine and two other fellows bursting into the room to know if he were ready for the race.

CHAPTER XV.

THE morning had opened cloudy, and had not yet cleared up, but as the day promised to be free from anything more than passing showers, there was every probability that the Derby, especially as it was so late in May, would be attended by its usual crowds. Avondale went down in Mr. Jardine's drag, Stuart and four friends, with a servant, making up the party. He mounted the box with Mr. Jardine, and thus obtained a better view of the mass of vehicles and horses, with their drivers and riders, moving towards Epsom as fast as the crush would allow them.

It is somewhat strange that a man of Mr. Jardine's calibre and temperament should join in the rush and bustle and excitement incidental to a racecourse, but he held that one may fairly now and then relax from the stiffness of common every-day life; that a person might occasionally throw off his dignity, and lay aside his cares and

ambition, without thereby compromising his position, or forfeiting his self-respect. The Derby, however, he considered scarcely a fitting scene for his wife or daughters—and he was not far wrong.

There is in human nature, and especially in Anglo-Saxon nature, a tendency to roughness and grossness, which, repressed generally in accordance with the teachings of civilisation, and the requirements of society, will, on occasions like these, burst forth with redoubled virulence. Saddening is the fact, and degrading the avowal, that with all nations, but especially with some more than others, freshness of spirits too often degenerates into coarseness of action, lightness of speech into still more lightness of thought.

Whence arises the fact? Is it that bodily and mentally the bad is inherent, the good but a graft? One is almost driven to the conclusion that vice and evil are the all-prevailing principle of nature, and that virtue, and purity, and light are but a derogation from the pre-arranged order of the universe. However, be that as it may, assign what reason we like for it, seek whatever explanation we choose, the fact remains patent

that at all meetings for allowing unrestrained intercourse, highly-flavoured tales are told and listened to with the greatest gusto, and indecent jokes arouse the loudest laughter. Too often the language and manners are such as absolutely to prevent the presence of ladies.

Thus it was that none of the gentler sex accompanied Mr. Jardine. And, though he attended the race, he never, save with here and there an associate, betted. He asserted the turf to be a hotbed of cheating and trickery; he looked on those who obtained their living by it as, without exception, knaves and rogues, and he had not a much better opinion of those of his own class who made it the occupation of their life; and, therefore, while willing to derive a day's amusement from the concourse of the thousands that yearly cover Epsom Downs, he never kept a horse, or otherwise patronised the sport.

They recognised many of their friends on their way. Half the members of both Houses of the Legislature were taking a day's release from their labours, as well as several members of the Government, careless of the uncertain position

they were in. Wyversley passed them near the downs, in his drag, with two or three men about his own age.

Some time later, in an open carriage, came Auricoma, and another beauty of the same class, as good-looking almost, perhaps, as herself, but decidedly less attractive. Mr. Jardine noticed them—

“What a fine woman that is, Walter! Pity she was not something else. If Wyversley does not take care she will certainly entrap him. He seems infatuated—you must try to save him from total destruction.”

They reached the course—but what need, what avails it, to attempt anew a description? It is a scene beyond a writer's power to reproduce, and must be viewed to be comprehended. It passes man's imagination to conceive from a mere narration. The rows of carriages extended mile on mile, the pushing, heaving, sweltering mob, the constant roar, now sinking into a half-subdued hum, now rising into a deafening din, the grand stand and the sea of heads that fills it, the tents that dot the heath, the cloud that on a shiny day overhangs it—words would fail to

depicture them. It is England's carnival. There, for once in the year, are drawn together all classes and grades—the peer forsakes his club, the merchant tears himself from his counting-house and the banker from his desk, the lawyer abandons his clients and the doctor his patients, the shopkeeper ventures to leave his business, and the artisan to put by his tools.

“For once in the year”—heaven grant it may not become oftener! Nothing more surely marks the degradation of a people than their abandonment to unseemly delights. Nothing more distinctly serves as an index to a nation's character than the pleasures to which they devote themselves. As long as a country's distinctive diversions are of a manly, elevating cast, so long will a healthful tone, in thought and in action, prevail in it. But change this—let its students, its traders, its labourers once begin to seek relief from their especial occupations by indulging in sensuous delights, and in even more animal enjoyment, and it will speedily sink into and be utterly whelmed in the pool of infamy into which it has deliberately plunged itself.

Thus has it ever been, but nowhere is the lesson to be read more clearly than in the annals of Rome. We may not—probably it will be said we cannot—follow in her footsteps, but we may easily walk beside them. The Circus cannot be re-established—it would be shocking. Ten or twenty pairs of criminals matched weekly in Hyde Park against savage animals from the Zoological Society's gardens would be a show that modern “civilisation” could not tolerate.

But it does tolerate evils quite as hideous, though not, perhaps, as pronounced. The ghastly procession that, night after night, year in, year out, flaunts up and down our principal streets is far more sickening than was ever a “game” in the Roman amphitheatre; and the never-ending fight which the unhappy mortals composing it have to carry on for bare existence, is far more one-sided than was ever struggle between Dacian Gladiator and Parthian tiger. Oh! my country, my country, wilt thou never purge thyself from this plague-spot? It is eating into thy very vitals, it is poisoning thy life's blood; a day will come when thou wilt bitterly lament thy heedlessness of thy unfortunate

children. God help them, the miserable victims of thy sins and cruelty, and help thee too, the still more wretched criminal.

Mr. Jardine's drag was soon besieged by acquaintances, some to talk with himself, others to chat with those who had accompanied him. Avondale seized the first opportunity for leaving, and made his way round to where he thought Wyversley would be. He easily found him. Many who did, and still more who did not know the party, were gazing at Auricoma's carriage and its occupants; but his lordship was smiling and chatting, with supreme contempt for the opinions or observations of those about him.

He received Avondale with a glad welcome, and introduced Auricoma—he had never yet spoken to her—to him as Miss Violet Erle, and her companion as Mrs. St. John Brooksley. The former evidently considered him one whose good favour was worth gaining, and she put on her handsomest looks. She was very sparkling and amusing, her conversation and remarks on the scene around distinguished her as a person whose endowments went farther than her pretty face, and Avondale comprehended more clearly than

before the fascination under which his friend lay.

“Do you care much for racing, Mr. Avondale?”

“No, not a bit, but I like to see the people that come together on a day like this. Look what an immense multitude it is. You could walk on their heads for a mile straight before us.”

“Yes,” assented Stansville, one of those who had come down with Wyversley. “There was a frightful squash on the road. Thought several times we should get smashed up.”

“But you did not seem to trouble much; at least, not when we saw you,” said Auricoma.

“Oh, no—what is the good of troubling your brains about anything of the sort? If you are pitched out, there is no help for it—better take it easy.”

“Was not aware before, Stanse,” put in Wyversley, “that you laid claim to the possession of brains. I was under the impression that you considered them a totally unnecessary part of your organisation—the less one has of them the better for his general comfort.”

“Yes, that is about it. I can’t see the need of a fellow sweating and bothering like Avondale, in the absurd belief that people will think a rap more of you for trying to benefit them.”

“You are very philosophical to-day, Mr. Stansville,” said Auricoma.

“You need not tell him so,” objected Wyversley; “compliments are wasted on him—better try Avondale.”

“I hardly know what to say to Mr. Avondale—I hear so much about him;” whereupon that gentleman bowed very lowly in acknowledgment.

“Ah, you should have seen him at billiards last night, Herb. You are a pretty good hand, but I think Hardman is almost your match. Well, Walter beat him three times running, a hundred up, the first time even, the second giving him thirty, the last giving him two strokes to one. In this game he made off one break thirteen cannons, three of them with both balls touching the sides.”

“Oh, Reginald, you must get him to come and play me,” said Auricoma.

“What do you say to it?” asked Wyversley.

“You won’t be so unpolite as to refuse a lady, or to beat her.”

“I shall be most delighted, but Miss Erle may rely that I shall certainly be so ungallant as to try my best to win.”

“By the by, who were with you, Avondale?” inquired Stansville. “Was not young Powercourt one?”

“Yes.”

“I thought I remembered him. What sort of a fellow is he now? He was with me at Harrow—somewhat of a cad then, and pretty much of a coward.”

“He is considerably altered—nothing much now, but he is at least a gentleman. I dare say the three years at Cambridge knocked the nonsense out of him. But he was some years younger than you, and perhaps you looked upon him as more timid than he was.”

“Likely enough. There is another fellow I have lost sight of since I left Harrow. Osbert—did you know him? He went to St. John’s. He was the best company one could come across. Three of them were there together, John and William Osbert, and their half-brother Robert

Hood. Their names brought on them a good deal of chaffing, as they were generally called Robin Hood, Little John, and William Fitz-Osbert, in allusion to some Radicals, forerunners of Sloe, I suppose, who lived goodness knows when. I mean John—William died one Long—did you meet him?”

“A few times. He was pretty much liked, but he went to the bad—got into the worst set at St. John’s, and that is about the worst set you could pick out in the ’varsity. I saw, however, that he was ordained the other day.”

“If you two would kindly shut up about your school days,” interrupted Wyversley, “and favour the company generally, we should feel obliged.”

“Very sorry—hope Miss Erle won’t be too hard upon one,” apologised Avondale.

“Not at all. I was enjoying your recollections of the past. I should very much like to see Cambridge.”

“Better say Oxford, Violet,” put in Wyversley; “that is worth going to.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” laughed Avondale. “Every one thinks his own University the best. But, see, they are clearing the course.”

“It is only for one of the smaller canters,” said Stansville.

“I have been here longer than I intended,” said Avondale. “I must be going back to Mr. Jardine; it was rather cool of me to leave him, but I was very anxious to make the acquaintance of your fair friends, Wyversley.”

And thereupon he took his departure, notwithstanding repeated requests to stay at least till they had had lunch.

The remainder of the day varied in nothing from other occasions. The races succeeded in due order. Some lost; Wyversley a considerable sum, Brayclift a small fortune, and one or two of the same lot nearly their all. Others won; Avondale to the extent of a £5 note, which exactly covered the gloves he had also won from various young ladies, but for which they most unjustifiably made him pay. The mob shouted themselves hoarse, half the spectators got drunk, and so the proceedings ended in the usual riot and uproar.

CHAPTER XVI.

THURSDAY! the eventful day which would herald publicly the transfer of the Premiership to another occupant, and would thus mark another period in England's story. The papers had very little fresh news for their readers. Failing this, they gladly recorded all the fleeting rumours, and launched out into speculations anent the policy of the future Government.

Hitherto one gentleman's name had been rather unaccountably overlooked. This was Richard Rowe's. He was one of the most noticeable men of the day, and his career might fairly point a moral. A splendid classic, better even than the new Premier himself, he had in early life, after taking a high degree at Oxford, passed some years as Professor of Latin, at University College, London. There the love of equality innate in him and strengthened by deep study of the master writers of antiquity, received a deeper

tinge from the advanced Liberalism which hung round that institution. Thus he became one of the strangest outgrowths characterising the time, a philosophical Republican—a man who from principle objected to aristocracies, and from conviction and reasoning despised the many-headed mob; who, from hatred of every species of coercion, opposed all religious establishments, and yet, forgetful of the lessons of history, was simple enough to believe that a political watchword or a social cry could take the place of a religious creed; who appreciated, as few save himself could appreciate, the poets and historians and philosophers of Greece and Rome, and yet condemned the perusal of their works as a means of education, and would banish them from the category of a school or college course; who would blot out every aspiration and aim of man beyond the mere living from day to day, and yet dreaded to extend political power to those of his fellows who were without those aspirations and aims.

He was a Stoic preaching cosmopolitanism, and despising all inferior to himself in intellect or determination; setting forth as the great ideal

the "Wise Man," and destroying the only method of attaining to that ideal; declaring true happiness to consist in the exercise of the mental powers, and maintaining in all its nakedness the principle of general utility. He was an Epicurean who had a thorough contempt for the allurements of pleasure and ease. He was a Conservative, who stamped upon every Conservative dogma; a Radical, who reviled demagogues.

His professorship he exchanged for a seat on the Executive Council of New South Wales. While there, Mr. Jardine made his acquaintance. They became good friends, though as often differing as agreeing on matters of policy. Both were men distinctive of their age and time. Both had had a very varied experience. The one, a descendant of Highland chiefs, semi-savage scarce two centuries back, had received no education in the least degree comparable with Rowe's, but, gifted with sterling sound sense and resolution, had fought his way upwards to a position of great influence, and was looking forward to a still higher rank; the other, come of the English middle-class, sprung from an ancestry of manufacturers and clergymen, had undergone a totally

different training, which had, however, brought him to the same goal. The former urged the admission of all men to equal rights and privileges as a necessary corrective for the ineradicable viciousness of human nature; the latter as energetically upheld the same doctrine as being demanded by the inherent goodness of mankind.

From New South Wales, Rowe returned to England a year or two before Mr. Jardine. His writings and his peculiar views had already acquired celebrity for him, and soon secured him a seat in our House of Commons; and then his brilliant oratory and his fluency of debate, within an even shorter period, compelled the Government to ensure his support by putting him into office.

With the Earl of Garmouth's predecessor, however, he could not agree, and he had, consequently, been for the last three or four years unemployed, but the enforced rest had increased, rather than diminished, his influence in Parliament. The "Times" of this morning declared that he would be a most desirable addition to Mr. Maitland's Cabinet; the "Mercury" spoke somewhat to the same effect, though not so plainly.

In fact, it was a question between Rowe the scholar, and Sloe the demagogue. Each was an advanced Liberal, but of very different views, and each had spoken very hard things of the other—in particular the demagogue, always headstrong and indiscreet, often ill-judging and unjust, had on one memorable occasion attacked his more polished compatriot in a strain that could never be forgotten, and barely be forgiven. It was this which seemed to raise a bar to their association, and which prevented Maitland's journal giving a clear expression on the matter.

The evening came, the House was thronged with members and strangers, but the public curiosity was not satisfied. Maitland made but a short speech. After the vote of Friday last, the Earl of Garmouth had considered it incumbent on him to tender to the Queen his resignation. In so doing, he had informed her Majesty that he did not consider the defeat as in the least subversive of the principles of the Liberal Government, and therefore advised her to entrust him (the speaker) with the formation of the new Ministry. This honour he had received. One or two necessary changes would, of course, have to

be made, but they would only slightly affect the constitution of the Cabinet. The chief would be in the appointment of a new Lord Chancellor. Lord Brentford having now filled that office some years, had expressed a wish to be relieved from it. The other alterations were comparatively unimportant, but as they were not yet complete, and as he would, of course, be expected to enunciate the future policy of the Cabinet, he deemed it requisite to ask an adjournment till Monday week, when all the re-arrangements would, he hoped, be finished.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Marchioness of Wharfedale's reception was tame, compared with the generality of such occasions. Less than the usual number of invitations had been issued, and more than the usual number of defaults had occurred. This was owing chiefly to the state of political parties, there being several parliamentary dinners that same evening; but it gave Avondale a better opportunity for securing the ear of her ladyship. She kept him near her during the earlier part of the evening, and introduced him to the most eligible parties.

"The Duke and Duchess of Cheshire" were announced, and the illustrious pair sailed by; the Duke, a thin, wizen man, about 5ft. 2in. high, who took the longest steps his legs allowed him, and tried to look very fierce; his wife, a stout, pompous woman, six inches taller.

"Their Graces," whispered Avondale, "seem

wonderfully proud of their new title. What they have received it for—I suppose it is a partnership affair—is a mystery to every one. I suppose Garmouth wished to clear off old scores. But, at least, they might have had the good manners not to have encroached on the Earl of Chester.”

“Sir Brian Boru and Lady Boru.” The last pair had received but a cold salutation; these were dismissed with a dignified bend, though Avondale’s smothered ejaculation of “Oh, Jemima!” in reference to the lady’s Christian name, very nearly upset her ladyship’s gravity.

They were popularly known as the Bear and his leader. Sir Brian was an Irishman, poor as St. Patrick, irascible as a turkey-cock, and not over good-looking, having a shock head of red hair, with moustache and whiskers of the same hue, and little grey twinkling eyes. Lady Jemima was the eldest daughter of a fashionable linen-draper in Regent Street; tall, thin, bony; eyes slightly wandering, and teeth very much so; nose small, but mouth and ears making up for what that prominent feature lacked in size.

“Sir George Edmunds and Lady Edmunds”—

on whom the Marchioness bestowed a smile and a few words of salutation.

“Mr. and Mrs. Greenham Softhead”—a slight smile.

“Has not Mr. Softhead the reputation of being a very amiable man?” asked Avondale.

“Yes, of course. Why?”

“A few years ago, four men at the Temple agreed to dine together, each to invite the most disagreeable person he knew, the names not to be told to each other, lest either might object to his friend’s guest as being especially objectionable, beyond even the limits of their wager. Covers were laid for eight, but only five came—the fifth being Mr. Greenham Softhead, of surly notoriety—each had made the same choice.”

“Oh, Mr. Avondale, it is quite a slander—you are a thorough scandal-monger.”

“He is, of course, altered now. That was before his marriage, and when he was unknown to your ladyship. The one event, doubtless, commenced his improvement, the other must have completed it, had his ill-temper been ten times as inveterate.”

“Your compliments are only—”

“ Lord Killarney and Miss de Brooke—”

“ Now, please don’t make me laugh.”

“ Killarney is radiant with the tints of early morn—and his stays!—he will burst them if he bends.”

They came up, made a low bow, his lordship’s being somewhat stiff and solemn, and stayed to exchange a few words with the Marchioness. She introduced Avondale, and when they had gone off, threatened to send him away.

“ I really could scarcely prevent myself laughing outright.”

“ I am dreadfully grieved—but look at him—he pretends to be no older than his grand-niece.”

“ The Honourable Stanley Carlton.”

The young gentleman paid his respects to Lady Wharfedale in an easy but half-affected way, nodded to Avondale, and mingled with the company.

“ The Honourable Albert Talbot and Lady Risborough.”

They remained a few minutes, passed the stereotyped questions and answers, and moved on.

“What think you, Mr. Avondale, of those two representatives of England’s youthful nobility?”

“I imagine they are not the best that could be found.”

“That is no reply. I wish to hear your opinion on the younger generation.”

“I fear it would not be acceptable to ears polite. The youthful branches of the nobility appear for the most part to be getting thoroughly careless of their rank and position. A great change is looming in the future, and they cannot see it, or will not heed. If they intend to maintain their exclusive privileges, it must be by deserving, not merely claiming them. But you will not thank me for commencing just now a tirade against the sloth and indolence of the classes to which ourselves belong.”

“I should very much; but there is Lord Wharfedale—you have not seen him yet—go and speak to him.”

Avondale somewhat ungraciously obeyed his fair mentor. The Marquis received him heartily, exchanged a few words, and later on in the evening, meeting him again, gave him a personal invitation to the dinner next day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITH some eagerness the following morning Avondale turned to the papers, but they contained only short comments on Mr. Maitland's speech. In fact, he had not said enough to lay either himself or his future measures open to criticism. As far as he had spoken he had intimated that he would be supported by most of his colleagues, and that little change would be made in the policy pursued by the late Premier. Mr. Sloe was passed over by all—even the "Pioneer" kept very quiet in respect of him—and scarcely more was said of his rival Radical, Rowe.

It was evident that negotiations were going on between Mr. Maitland and various parties which it was not advisable to make public. He himself was unmistakably in a fix. Should he break with the moderate Liberals or not—or, rather,

could he rely on their support? He possessed too much genius and talent, too great a contempt for popular applause, to be at heart a demagogue, but he was also far too ambitious to trouble much, if necessitated to make a choice, which side he headed—the Republicans, in making an indiscriminate attack on institutions in general, and on the Crown and aristocracy in particular; or the Whigs—or even Tories, for in early life he had belonged to this party—in upholding Church and State. The latter career he would prefer, but, rather than give up power, he would undoubtedly follow up the former. So just at present his mind was distracted between the two. He was in treaty with Howe, and very desirous to secure him, respecting, though jealous of, his talents, fearing him as a rival, and doubtful how far he could retain him as an adherent. He was holding out a bait to Sloe, not from any good opinion of the man himself, or of his principles, but from anxiety to restrain his hostility, and to conciliate his following. He was also labouring most earnestly to secure the goodwill of those powerful families who contemned him for an upstart, or disliked him for his temper, or dreaded

the lengths to which opposition might drive him. Thus it was that his own journal gave no sign, that the "Times" was not more communicative, and that the "Constitutional" afforded no information beyond vague rumours.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT Wharfedale House Avondale met several members of the two Houses, whose names were not unknown to him. Sir Henry Kerr was one of the guests ; Sir Edward Wharton another, a jolly-looking country squire, who had represented the eastern division of Mercia since his father's death, ten years before, a man who voted regularly for his own party without troubling at all about the measures brought forward, and who could not understand any one not of gentle blood being at the head of affairs ; Viscount Risborough was a third, a counterpart of Wharton, though not blessed with quite as much common sense, and having a greater liking for a good dinner ; Hugh Acton Bransdon was a fourth, a well-known traveller and author, who had been in the House about five years, and was pointed out by many as certain to take a high position in the political world ; Lord Hainesbury, who had been

under Magnus Jupiter, one of the Under Secretaries for Foreign Affairs, was another. Two more, a large shipowner, and a rising barrister on the Northern circuit, both M.P.s, completed, with Avondale and the Earl of Wyversley, the party.

Lord Wharfedale was a good dinner-giver. He had no brilliant talents, and was too devoid of energy and patient perseverance to leave any great mark behind him in the history of his country; but he was not, as Stuart Jardine once styled him, a dummy—rather the reverse. He was a better leader and controller than follower or originator. His good-nature and *bonhomie* were notorious, and he had a scarcely less reputation for polished manners and courtly address. The latter gained him friends at first sight, the former secured them on better acquaintance. Especially had he attained the difficult art of making his guests, not merely feel at ease, but also thoroughly delighted with each other and their host.

Avondale found himself between Sir Henry Kerr and Sir Edward Wharton, while opposite sat Wyversley, with Mr. Bransdon on his left,

and next their host; and on his right the ship-owner. Viscount Risborough took the end of the table. Conversation soon got into full swing. Kerr and Bransdon—he had been to India in his wanderings—went off into what was common ground to them.

“A grand country,” said the latter, “and capable of being made into a mighty empire, if the people could be awakened from the deadening influence of their religions.”

“Yes, doubtlessly,” replied Kerr, “but how is this to be done? We can only work carefully and unremittingly, and trust to the effects of time.”

“Your administration there has done a great deal of good, if you will permit me to say so; but don't you think that, perhaps, you have been going somewhat too fast? Don't you think you may have been pulling down without making full preparations for building up again?”

“You mean that we have been destroying prejudices and breaking down the barriers between caste and caste, and that, while doing this, we have not made arrangements for maintaining our own power. You think that our power

depends upon the enmity in India of race for race, and that by fusing the various nationalities we are destroying our main prop, we are consolidating India against, and not for us."

"It seems to me that is about the real view to be taken. The danger to England arises from within and not from without India, from the growth of one spirit among its different nationalities, and not from the invasions of Russia or France. The Indians prefer our rule to that of either of these, and will not change the burden, but they would have no hesitation about throwing it off altogether."

"Can the natives displace us?"

"Could they, if united? I should certainly say so. I do not deem it possible that there can be such an inherent distinction between one section and another of mankind, that a thousand of the former can keep in subjection a million of the latter."

"And you think, then, the time will come when Hindoostan will be governed by a representative assembly, chosen by its own inhabitants?"

Kerr being thus occupied, Avondale could

scarcely get a word with him, but he easily opened communications with Wharton—

“Who is to be the new Chancellor?” he asked.

“I can’t say. Have not the least idea. Pilgrim, I suppose. But lately affairs have got into such a muddle that I scarcely know which side is in office.”

“I presume, then, Sir Edward, you are not a very enthusiastic admirer of the new Premier?”

“Maitland? No. He is the most conceited—But Kerr is close by, one must not speak too plainly.”

“I don’t think you need fear speaking too plainly,” said Avondale, smiling. “It may be that Kerr himself would say much the same. By the by, don’t you think a nobleman ought to be Premier?”

“Yes, most decidedly, but they are all afraid. The Marquis of Wharfedale, for instance. He would do capitally, if he would put himself in front.”

“I suppose a good many M.P.s hold the same opinion?”

“A good many of us, I fear, have no opinion about anything—we simply go with the tide. It

is not much use to worry yourself; things go along pretty much the same, with or without your interference. Besides, we can't all be Cabinet Ministers, or even Under-Secretaries."

"Of course not."

"And the intrigue and scheming are unceasing. I am content to register my vote, and am never better pleased than when the session is over, and I can get from town back to the birds and the hounds."

Thereupon the conversation drifted to country topics, with which Avondale showed such an acquaintance as to charm the Baronet.

Dinner over, the Marquis whispered to Bransdon, "I wish to get a few minutes' chat with Kerr presently—would you oblige me by holding the lawyer in conversation?"

Then for some time he chatted with Kerr and Avondale, upon indifferent topics, till at last the latter asked him the question he had already asked Wharton—

"Who is to go to the Woolsack?"

"I have not the least idea," replied the Marquis; "I am entirely cut off from all sources of information. Better ask Kerr."

“Indeed, I was about to put him the question. How long is Maitland to head the Ministry?”

“I don’t know.” was the reply. “Not long, I fear—at least, so many persons think.”

“Yourself one, I suppose. And how long will the member for Ballock serve under him, if I may venture to ask?” said Wharfedale.

“That I cannot say—in fact, you are almost as good a judge of that as I am.”

“Well, excuse my saying it, is it at all likely that you and he can hold together long, as leader and adherent? We both know his peculiar temper, and that it is almost impossible to avoid exciting on the least debatable points his anger. We both know that it is that overbearing disposition of his which has caused the present break up as far as it has gone. Those financial measures were most absurd, and, speaking freely, I don’t wonder at Jardine seizing the opportunity to make capital out of the occasion—though, by the by, he declares that our young friend there is really to be thanked for the speech, and was the prompter who finally incited him to make the attack. But it was Maitland who put forward the scheme, purposely, it would seem, to bring

about the present crisis. I remember you opposed it, and so did I, and so did poor Kelly himself, who is now reviled on all sides by every would-be political economist ; but Maitland urged it most strongly, saying that we must at least make a show of reducing the taxes, and I don't know what else, and so finally he had his way—the result being that he has ousted Garmouth from his place and crept into it.”

“And there he is likely to remain.”

“Is that your private opinion? and if so, have you made up your mind to settle down quietly as his subordinate?” asked Wharfedale.

“There he will remain, at least, till the Liberals split up. The Tories have not the ghost of a chance,” replied Kerr.

“So one would imagine ; that is, at present,” observed Avondale. “But is it an utter impossibility that the great Liberal party may by some unforeseen series of catastrophes be broken up into hostile factions?”

“Anything is possible, especially in politics.”

“The formation of a party opposed to Maitland, for instance,” suggested the Marquis, with a faint smile.

“The formation of such a party? Yes, if the leader had confidence in himself, and the patience to work up the party and the ability to control it. But it would need a man good all round, and it would need, too, definite aims and purposes, more agreeable to the majority of Parliament than those of the present Government.”

Kerr, while speaking, had looked closely at Wharfedale; he smiled meaningly as he concluded.

Said the Marquis, “Let’s come to the point. Leaving the subject of leader apart, is the influence of Maitland over his colleagues such that he can be certain of keeping them with him?”

“Answer for yourself.”

“I have answered; would the same answer apply in your case?”

“If all his colleagues leave him, they simply banish themselves like sulky children who won’t join in a game.”

“You are a true Scotchman, ever cautious. If those colleagues left him, would Maitland and his especial clique have influence enough over the general body of the House to keep them in power against the active opposition of the col-

leagues who had been—so I prefer to put it—kicked contemptuously out of office?”

“Very likely not. Still, these said colleagues would not improve their own position by such a proceeding; they would simply play into the hands of the common foe,” replied Kerr.

“Are you so certain of that? Might not the following of the colleagues—using this rather vague term—be so superior in number to that of Maitland, as to be able to eject him, and seat their leaders in his place?”

“Perhaps so, but very doubtful. There is everything against such an attempt.”

“There is truly everything,” said Avondale; “everything but courage, resolution, foresight, tact, patience, luck—everything but ability, zeal, talent, capacity, hope.”

“If those qualities were all on the side of the smallest opposition ever known,” said Kerr, “they would give that opposition life and vitality, and swell it to a power irresistible.”

“Why should they not be on the side of the opposition now? Maitland is in power because he is in power—that is the whole reason—excuse plain speaking. He has taken his present

position because no one has openly questioned his right to it ; he lords it over his associates because they think he has such a vast intellect that they must stand abashed before it ; he turns them off as a miser does a worn-out servant, and they humbly accept their fate. No opposition has yet begun to consolidate, but there are all the germs of one ready to start into being. Do you ask for the talent? Take FitzHenry and Bransdon."

"Thanks, Avondale," interrupted the latter. "I could not help catching one or two of your words, and have since been listening. You appear in a new light. I congratulate you. You are putting into language what I have been thinking lately."

"Do you ask for tact? Take the Marquis and Jardine; and believe me, zeal won't be wanting."

"Apparently not."

"This is the first time, Kerr, I have really looked the matter in the face," said the Marquis. "Would you be inclined to join us? A beginning must be made somewhere. It will be months before opposition could take head; but I really think that you would best consult your own

feelings by voluntarily resigning before you are driven to do so."

"You have come down on me with a rush. I will think it over. Could I see you to-morrow morning?"

"Of course, any hour you like. And perhaps you won't object to Bransdon—if he is at leisure—joining us to give us the benefit of his advice."

CHAPTER XX.

SATURDAY EVENING, the report was common that Sir Henry Kerr had resigned. The papers of Monday morning confirmed it; and added that it was understood the Secretary for Ireland would take the post he had relinquished, while Mr. Percy Mulgrave would be promoted to the vacancy thereby created.

The "Times" was sorry to hear of the resignation, and did not altogether approve of the rearrangements. It doubted the new Secretary's fitness for governing the sister Isle, even in peaceable times, and much more so now, when the demon of discontent was once more arising, and agrarian crimes had been reported in many quarters. And it expressed some fears that Mr. Maitland might not be able to retain the full force of the late Ministry.

The "Mercury" took quite a different tone. In losing Kerr, an able man perhaps, but most certainly an obstructive one, had been lost, and

there could not be the shadow of a doubt, that in the ranks of Mr. Maitland's tried and trusty supporters, the real friends and future dependence of Britannia, many a man, at least his equal in ability and patriotism, could be found to supply the place of him, or of others who might be inclined to follow his example. The new President of the Indian Board was a statesman whose long experience (of nearly eighteen months—he had previously been second Secretary at the Court of Timbuctoo, till his elder brother, Sir James Lynworth, dying childless, had left him £20,000 a year) in Irish affairs, coupled with his intimate acquaintance with the peculiar idiosyncrasy of tropical peoples, would fit him admirably for controlling our Indian possessions, and for rendering the sway of England a blessing to countless myriads of subject Hindoos. In Percy Mulgrave, again, we had a politician remarkably fitted for the work allotted him. He was, by birth, partly an Irishman, and he possessed in an eminent degree the vivacity and frankness so characteristic of that race (he had had, indeed, up till his marriage with Lady Thanet, a most charming degree of frankness with his friends,

looking upon their purses as his own, and unhesitatingly borrowing from them whatever they might have to spare, from a crown to a £100 note).

As to the "Constitutional," events were turning out just as the poor old lady expected. "Was it at all likely that Maitland could retain the services of gentlemen? Read his replies to questions in the House if evidence were wanted of his bad temper and want of tact—examine carefully his speeches and proposals during the last two years, if doubts could be entertained of his leaning to Republicanism. One of the best men in the Liberal ranks had withdrawn, others must follow. Even his intimate friends must be utterly disgusted with the appointment of such an individual as Mulgrave to Ireland, a man utterly devoid of statesmanship, talent, or capacity."

Little was said by either journal as to the new Lord Chancellor, and even less as to the successor of Sir George Edmunds, his translation to the Home Office being confirmed—these points were confessedly delicate ground, and were therefore left untouched by comment.

CHAPTER XXI.

WYVERSLEY came to Granstone Street well to his time. The dinner, but a simple affair, was soon finished, and then, over their wine, the two young men began conversation.

“I may as well disburden myself at once,” said Wyversley. “I have come to make a confession, and to ask your advice, Avondale.”

“I shall be glad to listen to the former,” replied his hearer, “and to give you the latter, if it can be of any service to you—which, I dare say, is very doubtful. However, what is it?”

“The long and short of the matter is that I have been going to the bad fast.”

“Very likely; I thought as much. Still you cannot have dipped so very deeply into—what is the stock term for it—the vortex of dissipation.”

“No, not so very deeply for myself—that is, not so much so as at all to encroach on my property; but I have wasted quite enough to ruin

many men, and much more than I need. I had a good many bills, of one sort and the other, floating about when I came of age."

"And yet you had a splendid allowance."

"Yes—well, I settled these, of course, and then began to get about a bit. I don't know how the money went the first year. I did not spend much on horses or betting, and the alterations I had made at Wyversley did not exceed £10,000."

"Perhaps not, but I remember well enough that your house in Durham Square—Lady Wyversley was in town then—was for the whole of the season the scene of a series of pageants, reminding one of the middle ages; and I remember, too, a certain lady who, only one of many, according to common report, assisted you to get rid of your superfluous cash."

"You are not far wrong. We went that summer in my yacht through the Mediterranean. You have never been there, have you, Avondale? The beauty of the Grecian Archipelago surpasses belief. The glorious dawns—the lovely sunsets—the bewitching twilights, with the stars shining out beautifully bright in the dark blue sky, and

the darkness drawing on gradually and softly—you cannot imagine the effect, scarcely even recall it to mind. And then the thousand isles that dot the water—‘Eternal summer gilds them yet’—their surroundings and the reminiscences that come over one, of the long, long past, and of the heroes they have produced, and the events that have been enacted on them—Scio, Naxos, Delos, Zante, ‘Isola d’oro, fior di Levante’—their influence on the mind is beyond belief. Well, we passed the summer among these islands, touching only once or twice on the mainland. The autumn we spent on the Italian lakes, amidst scenery even more attractive to many; yourself for one.”

“Yes, I love the mountains and lakes. South Lyddonshire, you know, is hilly, and much of my life has been spent there.”

“The winter you remember there was a terrible noise about Rose Norton not coming back to fulfil her engagement at the Sun.”

“Yes, ’twas said in the summer that she had gone on the Continent for her health, and then at the beginning of winter, when she did not put in an appearance, we heard she was going to

be married to an Italian nobleman. The playgoers were finely annoyed about it, and I really could not understand it, though I have never troubled you as to the actual facts, as I saw you were thoroughly upset with something or other. A couple of months later her husband's sudden death was reported, and soon after, just before Easter, the lady herself once more returned to her occupation."

"The winter we had agreed to stay at Rome. We had been there two or three weeks when I noticed Rose change. She seemed to tire of my company, and she went out more than before, making rather freer than I liked with some of our acquaintances; we were living as man and wife under the title of Sir Arthur and Lady Vansittart."

"A pretty high ideal of morality, yours, my dear fellow."

"Well, I spoke to her—she objected to my interference. I forbade her to receive some two or three people whom I detested particularly. She would not be dictated to by me, a mere boy, as she styled me; our quarrel grew hotter, and in the midst of it Count Paschiato, as he called

himself, entered unannounced. He was said to be a Neapolitan nobleman who would not acknowledge the supremacy of Victor Emmanuel. He certainly was attached to the Court of King Francis, though in my prejudice I always looked upon him as a spy. He was a particular friend of Rose's, and, therefore, my especial aversion. I asked him what business he had with me. He had called on Lady Vansittart in reference to the devil knows what, and Rose said she was much obliged to him for his trouble. I incontinently told her to add that she would be still more obliged if he would immediately take his ugly visage off, and not show it me again. She would not, and—to cut the story short—I kicked him out of the house. An hour later we had arranged for a duel next morning. That evening, however, I was stabbed by a paid assassin, and by the merest chance in the world escaped death. I had, from instinct, I suppose, turned round to see the fellow after passing him. He was close by me, and I caught the gleam of the stiletto just in time to turn it off the heart on the ribs. I seized his right hand and struck him on

the head with a heavy walking-stick, fracturing his skull so badly that he died in twenty-fours, remaining insensible the whole of the time. I was laid up for a fortnight, and delirious for three or four days, partly from loss of blood, partly from excitement. During my illness Rose married the Count. I had, prior to leaving London, settled £5,000 on her, and I dare say I had given her as much after. When I recovered I found they had gone to Malta. I intended to follow, but was persuaded to return to England by the urgent remonstrances of Ravenshurst, who had come out just about the time I was stabbed; sent, I believe, by my mother. He declared he would keep the circumstance from her only on condition I returned with him, and so I came back, reaching London the day before Christmas."

"My dear fellow, I never suspected you had gone through so much romance. I met you, if you recollect, several times in January at Clair Street, and could not help noticing how very recklessly you played. I thought something was wrong, and gave Rose Norton credit for part of

it, but had no inkling of the real state of the case. But how was it she also returned soon after?"

"It seems—for I took the trouble to find out the real facts—that the Count was no Count at all, merely, as I had suspected, a spy. He had been a petty officer in the Sardinian army, and had joined in a conspiracy to render the troops disaffected, and so procure the recall of the dethroned Bourbon. The plot being detected, he had had to take refuge in the Pope's dominions, and had thenceforward been employed by King Francis to foment disturbances in the South, and to carry on the correspondence with different bandits. He was also married."

"Oh, your narrative is getting interesting, my friend."

"And towards the end of February his *vera uxor* searched him out, and put in her prior claim. He attempted to shut her mouth in the same way that he had tried to prevent our duel, but the fellow he employed mistook the woman, and stabbed Rose, happily not fatally, as you are aware. What was more, the police caught the would-be assassin, who thereupon

made a clean breast, and, of course, Paschiato was wanted next. He had, however, decamped; perhaps was sheltered by those in authority, and would, not improbably, have escaped, but for his wife's vengeance. At least, a few days later, his body was discovered in one of the by streets with a stiletto in the heart."

"So ends Act I. of your life."

"Yes, but it influenced Act II. very much. I felt thoroughly cut up with the adventure, and savage with everybody, and myself. The summer and early autumn had been a time of unalloyed pleasure and enjoyment; the winter—ugh!—I don't like to think of it. My bankers, too, at the commencement of the new year, informed me, to improve matters, that the outlay I had gone to at Wyversley and Durham Square, together with my other expenses during the twelve months, had shrunk the balance in their hands by near £80,000. I don't care a rap for money. I think it ought to be spent, not hoarded—but when I considered that this sum was, for the chief part, utterly wasted, and that the bitter experience I had acquired was thus dearly bought, it made me the wilder."

“I don’t see the force of the reasoning, though. Because you have made one false step, it won’t mend matters to make another that will take you further on the same road.”

“Doubtless not, and you remonstrated with me then, and so did others, but it was no good. Logic has not much effect when a man is bent on destruction. I lost heavily at Clair Street, and still more heavily, later on in the summer, at Baden. Then I lost a large sum on the races. I won at Newmarket and the Derby, but at Ascot and Goodwood I went altogether astray. And then these women; I never was out of their clutches. One would have thought I had had experience enough in that line, but I was like a moth that hovers round the flame till his wings are singed past recovery. At Paris I picked up a girl, Aimée de Beauvoir—you know her, the favourite danseuse at the Théâtre Condé—the devil, I suppose, brought us together. She went with me through Switzerland, and then to Wiesbaden, Baden, and Homburg. I seemed to be in bad luck whenever I played, but she tempted me on. At Homburg I did not go much to the public tables, but went chiefly to a

private house frequented by several acquaintances we had made in our tour. The stakes were not heavy at first, and for about a fortnight I had, on the whole, gained. One night, however, I was made drunk, or the wine was drugged, or something of the kind. I cannot remember anything distinctly; I only know we went on playing till the morning sun shone through the windows. Then we left off, and I fell asleep. Five or six hours later, when I came to myself, I found I had given bills for £30,000."

"That's buying experience with a vengeance."

"I could not deny my signature, but determined to play no more. Aimée used all her wiles to persuade me to have my revenge, but to no purpose. In the evening two Frenchmen, a Baron de Cluvere and a Captain Bruvante, who dined with us, tried the same arguments, but, finding me firm, took their departure somewhat vexed. It was a splendid sunset, and Aimée and I walked about the gardens for some time, thoroughly enjoying ourselves. She was sprightly—bewitching in fact—now tenderly turning her limpid eyes on me, and then cutting short my fine speeches—loving and distant by turns. You

know the ways of those girls, Walter—the father of evil must himself have given them lessons before sending them into this world on their errand of ruin and destruction. I had never seen her so attractive, and could have married her on the spot. As I had an engagement with some friends I had met that day, I left her very unwillingly about nine o'clock at our villa. I got over the call as soon as possible, and was hurrying back, when, while passing behind one of the little summer-houses, I heard well-known voices. The first words I caught were—

“‘Ah, Meinherr, das Spiel ist nicht aus,’ in a woman’s tones; and then in French, ‘If he comes back early enough, trust me he will visit the table once more this very night.’

“‘I hope so,’ grunted the German—’twas the fellow who owned the house—‘he is too good a bird to be let off at once.’

“‘You are a good girl, Aimée,’ said a voice I recognised as the Baron’s, ‘and if we can only get another £5,000 out of him for our share, we will go back to Lorraine, and rebuild the old castle, and you shall be La Baronne.’

“I could restrain myself no longer, but jumped

into the midst of the swindlers. I have not the least idea what I said, but the set began laughing in my face. I knocked down the Captain first—he was there—and the Baron next, when the German did the same for me with the loose leg of one of the chairs. I suppose they picked my pockets, for watch, purse, and rings were all gone. I must partially, at least, have come to myself, for I heard Aimée say—‘*Pauvre garçon*, he looks beautiful in the moonlight.’ How long I lay there I don’t know. The police found me, sent, I believe, by the German, carried me off to the lock-up, and, spite of my asseverations, kept me in durance all night, hinting that I was drunk. They let me out willingly enough next morning, when I had sent for my friends. When I got back to the villa we had taken I found everything in confusion. Aimée’s maid must have been in the plot, for both were gone. Boxes and drawers were ransacked, and every article of jewellery and the like had disappeared. I had the German arrested, but as I could prove nothing against him, and as he showed that he had not left his house that evening, the only result was that I had to pay the costs and him 200 thalers as

damages, and was, besides, considered half-crazed by the English visitors at the Springs."

"Well, Wyversley, your adventure sounds like a romance; but so much talking must be rather dry work. Take another glass of this Madeira—it is old—my grandfather put it in bottle in '16, in memory of Waterloo. The governor has not above three-dozen of it left now—he sent me up half-a-dozen bottles on my birthday, a week or two ago."

"It is very good—has a good flavour; but I am no judge of wine. I can tell when it is bad, and that is all."

"That is one of the strange points about you—mad for women, careless of wine."

"No, not exactly that. I am attracted towards woman, not from any sensuous, much less sensual pleasure, but from an inner prompting which makes my soul long for female companionship."

"Why, in the name of goodness then, my dear fellow, don't you select one of your own station—these creatures cannot surely be your ideal of female perfection, or supply the spiritual communion you long for."

“No—I dare say it is because I have been brought up amongst the other class.”

“Go on with your adventures. I won’t argue with you, at least not now. This is the end of Act II., I presume.”

“Not quite. I thought of searching for Baron Cluvere, but soon came to the conclusion that it would be useless. I did, nevertheless, ascertain that there was no family of that name in Lorraine, and last Easter I learnt something more of him. I came across Aimée as a street singer in Paris. I ventured, doubting the advisability of the step, to send for her, and after some time she told me the sequel. The Baron was really one, though the owner of but a few acres of barren land, his true name being l’Espronte. He cheated the ‘Captain,’ who was Aimée’s brother and an adventurer living by his wits, out of his share of the plunder, and hinted that he would have him prosecuted for attempting to extort money, when he, the ‘Captain,’ had threatened to denounce the Baron. He, of course, did not marry Aimée, whom he had known for some years, and who had often lent him money, but kept her as his

mistress only till the commencement of winter, then replacing her by a new face.”

“A scamp of the purest water—one of the most characteristic productions of the new empire. One consolation, the devil generally gets his own.”

“He has got this fellow. He—Cluvere, I mean, not the devil—was riding in the Bois on New Year’s Day—he was not very grand in the saddle—when his horse slipped on the frosty ground, pitching him forward, and breaking his neck. Aimée told me she had had a hard time of it during the winter, not being able to get into a theatre again. Her face bore witness to this. I gave her two or three pounds, and said I would supply her with what she might want to get into some small business, if she would try to find an opening somewhere—and then she broke down into a bitter flood of tears, praying me to forgive her. Poor mortal, we all want forgiveness badly enough. I can never stand a woman’s tears. In about a week she came to me, saying she had come across such a nice little concern, a *modiste’s*, or something of the kind. All that she wanted was £50, if I really

could be so bountiful. I at once handed her the money, and was thoroughly rejoiced to think I could put down to my account at least one good action. The next evening I went to the opera, and whom do you think I saw in the front row of the dress circle?"

"Oh, Aimée!" exclaimed Avondale, with a burst of laughter. "It is really too good, my dear fellow. Go on—I shall not be surprised if you say the Baron was with her."

"No, not the Baron, but some other fellow of the same stamp—one of her old acquaintances, probably. She, herself, was resplendent—it would have required a practised hand to have made out her true position. The *rencontre* gave me such a revulsion of feeling that I returned to England *instanter*, perfectly disgusted with the duplicity of human nature."

"And perfectly satisfied, I presume, with your own career during the past two years, and with the deep respect you had paid to the requirements of society, and to the wishes and opinions of your friends and relatives."

"Quite the reverse—as much vexed at my own stupidity and mis-spent time, as any living

being could possibly be, and, indeed, I am not much better pleased with myself now. When the bankers, at the beginning of this year, went over my accounts, they reported I had shrunk the balance by about £60,000 more; and at Newmarket and the Derby I have since sent off another £10,000. But, by Jove, it's after nine o'clock already, and I have a very particular message for you, Walter. Lady Wharfedale wishes to see you this evening. She specially charged me to bring you to the house—I was there this morning—as soon as possible after dinner. Dear me, I shall be finely blown up for being so late.”

“What is it, Wyversley?”

“Can't tell—you must learn from the lady's own lips. So, excuse me, the quicker we are off, the better. I will finish my narrative some other time; and, by the by, you were going to see Auricoma—would Wednesday evening suit you?”

“Yes; at present I am not engaged.”

“Then we will go down to Chelsea together.”

“Agreed; but Wyversley, my dear fellow, you must get clear of the betting harpies that

are about you. Anything will be better than walking to perdition eyes open. Try politics, travel, or even go in for missionary meetings—anything at all—spend your money on model cottages or amateur locomotives, but don't let knavish jockeys and villainous pothouse-keepers diddle you out of it."

CHAPTER XXII.

THEY took a cab in Piccadilly, and reached Wharfedale House in a few minutes. In addition to the visitors, whom the Marquis was never without, only Mr. FitzHenry and Lord Ravenshurst had dined with him that day. The gentlemen had come into the drawing-room just before the arrival of Wyversley and Avondale. The Marchioness complimented them upon their punctuality, and trusted that the remembrance of her request had not proved too heavy a strain for the Earl of Wyversley's memory, or the performance of it too great an encroachment on his private engagements.

"You see how it is, Walter," said the offender. "You can never swerve a hair's-breadth from a lady's command, or omit a little of it, without subjecting yourself to the terrors of the inquisition."

"Please, excuse him," pleaded Avondale.

“He has been giving me an account of his visits to the Continent, and no wonder if messages to such an insignificant individual as myself should have run the risk of being forgotten.”

“I dare say his peregrinations have been most interesting—I have never heard anything of them—and I trust satisfactory to himself; but I wished to see you, Mr. Avondale, about something quite as interesting—your own future. Oh, here is the Marquis; he will explain it to you.”

The Marquis was very glad to see Avondale, and immediately took him off to FitzHenry.

“Here,” he said, “is the young gentleman we have been talking about.” Then turning to Avondale, who had not the faintest notion what it was all about—“we want you to try at once to get into Parliament.”

A light instantly broke over his listener’s mind, and he comprehended intuitively whom he was to oppose—

“You wish me to put up against Mulgrave, if he has to seek re-election.”

“Just so—who told you?”

“No one—I have been wondering since Wyversley informed me of your commands, as to

what the message meant ; but it flashed through my brain on your speaking that it was the new Irish Secretary you would put me against. Is it settled that Mulgrave is to take that post?"

"I believe so—I heard as much early this morning, and Lord Ravenshurst—I will introduce you to him directly—tells me the matter was finally arranged this afternoon. If so, we must lose no time. Do you know Waterbridge?"

"Not a bit."

"So much the worse, but we must make the best of it. FitzHenry is well acquainted with one of the leading firm of solicitors there, and promises to get them to take you up."

"It is very kind of him—I am extremely obliged to you, sir."

"Don't thank me at all," replied FitzHenry. "Lady Wharfedale is the grand conspirator. It is a great pity you are not yet called. It would give you a better standing."

"That difficulty won't stand in my way. I have been called three terms."

"Have you? I am delighted to hear it, Whose chambers have you been in?"

“Gilbert's in Pump Court—do you know him?”

“Yes, perfectly well—a descendant of the man ‘On Uses,’ and a very good Chamber Counsel. I wonder I did not notice your name, but I do not think I see the list at all. We shall have to get your address ready to-morrow, and send it off by the evening post to the gentlemen, Rosse and Taylor, who are to bring you out. I will write them, too, and I have no doubt that they will enable you to have, at least, some chance. Have you had any experience in canvassing?”

“Not worth speaking of. I have, of course seen one or two contested elections carried on in my own neighbourhood; but only from the outside—my father takes no interest in them.”

“Then you have, by all accounts, a treat in store,” laughed the Marquis.

“I know,” replied Avondale, “Waterbridge has a somewhat unsavoury reputation, but, I suppose, a candidate need not necessarily mix himself up with all the blacklegs in the town.”

“Perhaps not—it is rather difficult to avoid it.”

“Don’t be in the least afraid of that, Avondale,” said FitzHenry; “the firm I introduce you to are most honourable men, Posse especially, who comes of a good county family, and who would, but for strong leanings towards a country life, have chosen the higher branch of the profession. I have no doubt, too, there are some honest men among the voters; and you will have on your side most of the Church party—Dissent is rampant there—and of the Tories. If you don’t get in, you will, at least, have made your *débüt*, and if the other side go to any very bare-faced bribery we will present a petition.”

Here Wyversley joined them, saying that the ladies were extremely anxious to know whether the interesting debate was to be continued all the evening.

“It does not look very polite of us,” said the Marquis, “to remain chatting here in a corner. I presume it is settled so far, Mr. Avondale? The best way will be, perhaps, for you to call on me to-morrow morning, say by 12 o’clock, with your address ready. I will look it over, and after lunch you can take it to FitzHenry’s chambers—

will you be in to-morrow afternoon? What time will suit you—3 o'clock?"

"I think so—if I am called away, I will leave a note for our young friend."

"Then the meeting is adjourned *sine die*. Come on, Avondale—here is Lord Ravenshurst."

Ravenshurst was a man well known in society, almost unheard of in the world at large. He had travelled considerably, was a good linguist, had a cultivated taste for art, and was as well read in history and general literature as he was acquainted with modern courts and institutions. An innate dislike for bother had prevented him embarking on the troubled seas of politics. He had given too much attention to his books and travels to find time to fall in love now. In early life, and as he had been but a cadet of his family, he had had no opportunity of doing so. He had by a chain of unforeseen occurrences, come into the title a dozen years previously, but his inclinations were then fixed. His only sister, Clare, was the wife of Sir Hugh Champion. He was a distant relation and intimate friend of the Countess Wyversley, and was consequently greatly interested in her son's welfare.

Lord Ravenshurst uttered a few courteous words expressive of his pleasure at making Avondale's acquaintance, and then the latter passed on to where Lady Wharfedale, and one or two ladies, were sitting. He thanked her for the interest—which she repudiated—she had shown towards him, and for the trouble which FitzHenry at her request had promised to take on his behalf. He stayed but a short time, for he was eager to think over, quietly by himself, his prospects. His hostess introduced him to two or three of the guests, and then, after a little fashionable chit-chat, he took his departure.

FitzHenry and Wyversley accompanied him to the hall.

“I think you are politician enough,” said the former, “not to need any caution on the score of prudence and secresy. Of course, you enter on this election entirely on your own responsibility, and without prompting from any one—you understand?”

“Yes, I hope so. I can fully perceive the absolute necessity of not allowing any other person's name to be mixed up with mine in the matter.”

“That's right then.”

“Walter, excuse me,” said Wyversley; “if, in respect of money matters, I can be of the least service to you, do not hesitate to command me—you will confer a favour on me.”

“Much obliged, but I believe I shall not have the opportunity of making use of your kind offer.”

“I hope you will, if you can—and don’t forget that I will call for you on Wednesday, at 5.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

AVONDALE, with the irrepressible eagerness inseparable from youth, sketched the outline of his address before going to rest. But when he had done this, and laid down, sleep long refused to visit his eyes. Many and varied were the thoughts that flitted through his brain. Of the two great springs of human action, ambition, rather than love, was his prompter. From early youth gleams of future greatness had appeared to him. He had, to a great extent, been a solitary child, cut off from association with others of his own age, his chief companions being his stern father and his sister. Thus, not a little of his time had been spent in gazing at the portraits hung on the library walls at Avondale, or at the suits of armour arranged in the hall. Stories too of his ancestors' renown had been often told him by the old servants of the family, and, even farther back, his nurse had lulled him to

sleep with ballads narrating the deeds and actions of heroes of the olden time. As he grew older, he, by degrees, learnt to comprehend better the greatness of his family in past centuries, and more and more fixed became the determination that he would strive to restore it to the position it had once occupied.

He had selected law for his profession, in the fixed resolve to toil up its rugged and uninviting paths to fame, but he had no real liking for its study, and found extremely difficult the task of applying his attention unremittingly to its technicalities. It was, therefore, with unalloyed delight that he saw the far wider and more exciting career of politics thrown open to him. He had thorough confidence in himself, the confidence that every true man ought to have in his powers before entering on any undertaking. He knew how delighted his father and sister would be at his success, and he felt that he had many firm friends who would cheer him on.

A lady, too, as is almost universally the case, was influencing his thoughts. This was Miss Dawson. He regarded her with very mixed feelings, not, perhaps, so much with love, as with

a romantic idea of attempting to heal a breach between the two houses. Their parents, as already mentioned, were on terms anything but friendly.

This idea he had conceived years ago; it had grown with his growth, but had hardly ripened into the affection that knits soul to soul and heart to heart by an indissoluble bond, and that has such an overwhelming effect on the opening life of man or woman.

The papers next morning chronicled an item of news, totally unexpected, and of great moment to Avondale—the death on the previous day of Mr. Ileford, the senior member for Waterbridge. He was a consistent Liberal, and had long been in the House, though he had occupied his late seat only for the last two or three sessions. This event, if it did not give Avondale the better chance of election, at least took away the invidiousness of opposing a Minister, and it certainly could not increase Mulgrave's hopes. Candidates who might have been indisposed to contest the single seat with him would not feel the slightest objection to coming forward now there were two vacancies.

Walter drew out his address again, and then, soon after breakfast, called on Mr. Jardine. That gentleman was not at all surprised at the information, and congratulated him on the opportunity offered. One bit of advice he tendered—

“Whatever you do, Walter, whatever may be the odds against you, do not bribe. Supposing the other side is just as bad, so that in case you should be successful—not very likely at the first attempt—they would not venture to petition, still you will not feel satisfied with yourself, and there is always the risk that at some future time the affair may come out. You know how the evidence extricated by the special commissions on Gauntville and Herrington brought about the Bribery Bill, which, besides fixing heavier penalties, may take from the Commons the hearing of petitions, and hand them over to the judges. We do not yet know how the Bill, if passed, will work, but there is no fear that any case will be hushed up, because it is too disgraceful. Waterbridge would be a capital place for the first trial. You are, of course, aware, Walter, that that borough is noted for its more than average disregard of common honesty.”

“Yes! It is on a par with Dirty Lucre, in East Anglia, the town represented by that immaculate Dissenter, Sammy Simpkins.”

“These two towns are a well-fitted pair. Neither could escape disfranchisement, if one of their elections were inquired into. I am surprised that Mulgrave runs the risk; but he is unlucky, or a bad canvasser. He has failed two or three times, and is probably glad with what fate offers, and content to wade through a little mud to get into office. But I won’t bother you with advice just now. Do you know that the Dean of Cambridge is to be the new bishop?”

“No; the papers have nothing about him. But I am not surprised, I had an inkling Tracy might not be appointed.”

“Ah, I thought as much. You set that stone rolling, I suppose. Persuaded Lady Wharfedale to conspire with a whole lot of other women, and so to get Garmouth to assert his prior right—was that the fact?”

“Oh, no. Lady Wharfedale would not allow me to give her advice; and, being such a champion of her husband, she probably required no prompting to do Maitland a bad turn. Besides,

the appointment of Tracy would have been a slur on the whole Church."

Mrs. Jardine here came in, and her husband explained Avondale's errand. She warmly congratulated him, and wished him all success, and made him promise to come to dinner that evening, to narrate the progress of his undertaking.

Thence Avondale proceeded to Wharfedale House. He found the Marquis disengaged, and expecting his arrival. The address proved satisfactory—one or two sentences were suppressed, and the wording slightly altered, but nothing more.

"It would have been a difficult matter," said he, "for you to oppose Mulgrave without appearing to play into the hands of the Tories. An unknown man, you could not have had much hope of success without their assistance, which, however, might have turned the scale in your favour, backed up as you will be by FitzHenry's secret influence. But the, I may say, opportune decease of Ilford has given you a substantial excuse for offering yourself. The Tories, too, will now, undoubtedly, bring forward their own man. Who will be the other Radical candidate

I have no idea. One thing we must lay down—you must not, on any account, bribe.”

“Upon that I am determined. I will not run the risk of an exposure, in case a petition should be presented.”

“Keep to that determination. You might yourself, perhaps, wish to petition, which, if you had been mixed up in any dirty work, you would not venture to do. By the by, do the papers say anything about the new bishop? I have not had time to look at them.”

“Not a word; but Mr. Jardine has told me—I have just left him—that the Dean of Cambridge is to be the man.”

“Yes, how did he hear?”

“He did not say. I presume it is your lordship’s influence that has brought about the change.”

“I suppose so, partly; but it was Lady Wharfedale who was the active party, though I have no doubt the Earl of Garmouth was not at all grieved at the opportunity of depriving his late colleague of a valuable piece of patronage. How will Mordaunt Tracy take it?”

“I imagine it will not affect him in the

slightest. He is a man too intent upon his own welfare to care much for the rise or downfall of his relative unless it concerned himself *pro tanto*."

"He prides himself, I believe, on his knowledge of the world, but his sagacity may not prove as deep as he considers it."

"Very probably not. I have seen very little of him the last fortnight. He keeps out of the way—is negotiating with Maitland, I suppose—indeed, the other day the 'Mercury' mentioned his name for office."

"So I heard. There have been lately countless meetings and deep plottings at Lady Barnet's, conglomerations of men of all shades of opinion, dinners, and I know not what. And the good lady herself has been most active, driving about and visiting unremittingly."

"Tracy, however, has been completely dropped again. I see that the Lord Chancellor is to retain office."

"Yes, evidently Maitland is making desperate efforts to conciliate all parties."

"He will probably fail; his temper is against him. I cannot see any insuperable difficulty to

reorganising the Liberals and moderate Tories. If this were done, if they had any definite path before them, any recognised leader, many of the present Ministry would resign—the Marquis of Exmoor, Herbert Williams, and Lord Tintern; for instance.”

“That may be; but it is no very easy matter to discipline a disorderly crowd; and who is there can undertake the task?”

“Your lordship need hardly ask who should take upon himself the office of leader; and the finding able and willing assistants would be no very difficult matter.”

“*Peut-être*—one must have patience. There is no need to force your neighbour’s play when you have a pretty good hand yourself. If Maitland retains men like Williams he will have to show more tact and command of temper than he just now gets credit for. If he cannot do so the Radicals alone will not suffice to keep him in power. Anyhow he must make up his Ministry by next Monday, and pitch upon some defined policy.”

“He won’t find it a very easy matter.”

“No, nor would any one else. There are so

many subjects requiring legislation, or at least on which the country demands legislation. The church, law and justice, criminals, education, the colonies, Ireland—that shoal on which so many Ministries have stranded—all these are subjects of more or less importance, either is quite sufficient to displace an unstable Government. But we will adjourn to lunch, if you please.”

Arrived in the dining-room, the Marquis apologised for the absence of the ladies.

“They are all out, and I am quite alone. Even my secretary has left me for the day. Your grandfather used to be a frequent visitor here, Mr. Avondale. He was an intimate associate of my father when a young man; there is one of his portraits between the windows. Both were thoroughly rackety, but those little wildnesses were condoned when the last of the Georges was king. It is very different now, you must bear that in mind. I wish Wyversley could be persuaded to settle down to politics. He has spent a lot of money one way and the other; no one but himself knows how, though rather ugly tales are afloat concerning his doings on the Continent. The Countess is deeply grieved for him; it is the

reason why she is not in town this season. How long have you known him? You appear familiar with him."

"About three years; lately he has rather taken to me."

"I wish you would exert your influence to get him to attend more to the duties of his station; I should deem it a personal favour. I would be the last to withdraw young men from the amusements of their age, or even from its indiscretions. It saves them from being prigs and muffs, and it gives them experience which they must acquire sooner or later, and which is necessary to understand fully the forces bearing upon society. But the line is easily overstepped, especially by persons composing a peculiar class with special privileges, whose deeds are scanned very closely by the public."

"Your lordship is quite right; I have pressed the same on Wyversley. He entirely agrees with it; but his good-nature and easy disposition make him a prey, even with his eyes open, to the machinations of modern harpies."

"Good-nature and easy disposition are the

bane of many a man. Always bear in mind your own philosophy, Avondale."

They went on chatting till lunch was over, and then Avondale sought Mr. FitzHenry's chambers. The lawyer was engaged in a consultation which occupied half-an-hour. At length he was admitted into the great man's presence, though press of business limited the interview to a very few minutes. Mr. FitzHenry glanced hurriedly over the address.

"Good, though not improbably Rosse and Taylor will alter it a little. There is a telegram from them."

It ran—

"Ileford's death known last night. Starrett, shipowner, offers himself and addresses a meeting to-night. Send your friend down to-morrow."

"You see you must be off at once. Here is my letter to Rosse and Taylor. I tell them sufficient about you, and that you will not bribe even if they would, which is not likely. I will put your manifesto in it. Let me hear from you after your first day's canvassing. I cannot do more than wish you good luck."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AVONDALE returned to his rooms, wrote home to ask his father's permission to proceed to the election, and to tell his sister he should not be able to meet her on her arrival in town on Thursday, but that no doubt Mr. Jardine would do so; and sent a brief note to Wyversley to tell him it was impossible to keep his engagement.

This done, he dressed and went to Mr. Jardine's. An agreeable surprise was in store for him in the presence of Miss Dawson. She had come to town a day or two before, and was staying with some friends of the Jardines, who, with Mr. Renshall, formed the sole guests. Mrs. Jardine had seen her there, and having some slight knowledge of Avondale's feelings, had invited her solely for his sake, for in truth Miss Dawson had not favourably impressed her. She was a fine, taking girl undeniably, but she was too taking, too *prononcée*, too much in the style

of Kate Vandeleur, who was her especial abhorrence. Tall, well made, haughty in carriage, lively in conversation, a girl, in fact, who would attract notice anywhere, and who was aware of it. Her features were good, but somewhat too fleshy, and exhibiting that tendency to coarseness which transforms many a woman beautiful at three-and-twenty into a masculine matron at thirty. She received Avondale quite coolly with none of the animation that betokens more than every day acquaintance, with condescension rather than love. When she heard of the prospect before him, and saw the thorough heartiness with which Mr. Jardine's family entered into his recital, she deigned to exhibit some little interest also.

"I think I shall go down, too," said Mary Jardine. "I should so like to see an election, especially if there was a row—of course, if I were in safety," she added.

There was a laugh at the qualification, and then one of the guests said—

"I don't think your wish would be gratified at Waterbridge. It is a most unromantic town, and its inhabitants have a most unromantic

liking for bribery. It is in the midst of a marsh, a few miles from the sea, situated, so to speak, on a mudbank. Dirt abounds everywhere, in the streets, in the stream that crawls through it, and the electors have a wonderful liking for that article. They would take any amount of Miss Mary's money, but they certainly would not fight to please her."

"A charming place, truly, Walter," ejaculated Stuart Jardine.

"By the by, Mr. Avondale," asked Mrs. Jardine, "when does your sister's train come in on Thursday? We must go to meet her."

"About three o'clock. I have written to tell her I shall be at Waterbridge then."

"Is Edith coming up?" enquired Miss Dawson. "I will come and meet her if Mrs. Horler will excuse me."

"Thank you; she will be very glad to see some one she knows," replied Avondale.

Dinner over, Stuart Jardine arranged to go down with Avondale next day. Avondale was sorry not to be able to wait for his sister, but as he must return before Saturday when he

had to give evidence for the railway, it did not much matter.

Miss Dawson sang one or two songs which he asked for, and even assured him she should anxiously await the news of his success. She added that she would write to his sister the next day and tell her she had seen him, and how very pleased she would be to have her in London—all which kind words Avondale treasured up in his heart—or thought he did, which was much the same, and well nigh as satisfactory to both parties.

BOOK II.

WATERBRIDGE ELECTION.

WATERBRIDGE ELECTION.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT a wonderful vitality the British Constitution must possess! Battered by opponents, ridiculed by philosophers, abused by reformers, assaulted from without and within, its foundations rotten and decayed, its exterior patched and defaced, it yet survives, while many a more showy but less stable edifice has tumbled into ruins. For many reasons must it be styled a wonderful structure. Based upon feudalism, that makeshift confessedly devised to mould together into new shape the scattered remnants of the Roman empire, it has never entirely got rid of its ancient form. Feudalism still exerts a powerful influence amongst us. The peerage now is the peerage of the Conqueror, with its powers intact at least in theory, with its invidious privileges scarcely diminished. Westminster Hall is the West-

minster Hall, as the English Justinian left it; a court has been added, the number of judges increased, and one desperate attempt made to bring justice home to the door of each man; but no great innovation has been made, and the judges who invented "Fines and Recoveries," and the Chancellors who built up "Uses," could, with a little assistance, resume their seats beside their learned brethren of the nineteenth century, and might, not unlikely, be able to assist these in dealing with primogeniture, the L. C. & D. Ry. Co. "Limited Liabilities," and Trades Unions.

Monasticism, too, has left its mark, and only within the last few years have people awoke to the knowledge that the system of education contrived in the middle ages is hardly the best kind of training to fit a man for dealing with Atlantic Cables and Armstrong guns, Suez Canals and Organic Chemistry.

Henry VIII. yet lives in the supremacy that hampers every motion of the National Church, and that enables under its protection the infidel to repudiate openly the oath which never bound his conscience, and the Papist to ape the mummary of the Church which delayed for centuries the

advance of civilisation. Elizabeth's famed poor-law still fills our workhouses with a pauper population, and spite of Malthus' cogent reasoning and Ricardo's penetrating intellect, is yet by the majority believed to be the only panacea for the ills of poverty. The Divine Right of the first Stuart even now prohibits marriage between a subject and that higher order of being in whose veins flows blood drawn from the charmed fountain of royalty.

Truly our whole social system is a most extraordinary conglomeration of anomalies. Norman, Plantagenet, Tudor, and Stuart, conqueror, statesman, tyrant, and fool have each contributed to the *olla podrida*; Saxon freeholder, feudal baron, knight templar, shaveling monk, bigoted Puritan have one and all left an unmistakable relic in the mass; and now we stand gazing half in dread, half in wonder at the ungainly, unwieldy, tottering pile, longing to pull it down, ere it comes crashing on our heads, yet doubting our ability to restore it.

But of the whole arrangement, our mode of conducting elections is from beginning to end—canvass, nomination, poll—perhaps the best

specimen. The candidate makes the circle of his constituency for the express purpose of biassing in his favour, by fair reasoning or downright lying as best suits, the mind of each householder. The nomination takes place in public amidst deafening shouting, and in presence of a yelling crowd, on no other grounds than that "it has always been so;" and the polling is similarly carried out, in order apparently to afford the blacklegs and ragamuffins a saturnalia and an opportunity for indulging their peculiar tastes.

CHAPTER II.

A RIDE of four to five hours brought Avondale and Stuart Jardine to Waterbridge. This is a small tenth-rate port, doing little save coasting trade. It is situate some six miles from the sea, in the midst of a moor, which encloses it all sides and extends from the shore, inland nearly or quite fifteen miles to where a low ridge of the chalk rises up through the alluvium, spreading northwards half-a-dozen miles to the Iron Hills, and southward twice as far to the high grounds of Torbury. The country around affords rich grazing pasture for large herds of cattle. Indeed, the view in the summer from either of the "Cairns" of Torbury, is fine and pleasing. Below, reaching to the very foot of the Torbury range, lies the plain, fruitful, fertile, watered by several small streams, which unite to form the river, running through Waterbridge, here, stretching acre on acre, heavy crops ready for the scythe, there many

a fat "beast" peacefully browsing. But in winter this is altogether changed. The whole moor often lies under water, and Waterbridge itself barely escapes inundation. The railway runs for some distance along the coast, and is elevated sufficiently to give passengers a very fair prospect of the country through which they are passing. Thus our travellers were inclined to form a much more favourable opinion of the neighbourhood, whatever its inhabitants might be, than they had been led to anticipate. It was a grand summer's day, the moor was clothed in freshest green, and the heights of Torbury forming the back ground, completed the picture.

They sent their luggage to the "Royal George," the chief hotel, and themselves at once sought out Messrs. Rosse and Taylor. These gentlemen were well known to every one, and their offices were reached in a few minutes. Both were in. Mr. Rosse was a tall, portly man of commanding presence, about fifty. He showed little of the lawyer, and much more of the country gentleman. He had a recognised position and influence in the town, and was the confidential adviser of most of the best families

in the district, Tory as well as Liberal, though in politics he was himself of the latter party. Taylor was a different individual, the working partner. He was fifteen years younger, had an agreeable but professional manner, and was generally respected for his astuteness. He gave our two friends a quick, clear look, and then picked out Avondale, before the latter had made himself known. Avondale introduced Jardine.

“The son of the member for—I really forget the place?” asked Mr Rosse.

“I have the pleasure,” replied Jardine. “I have come down with my friend to see how he gets on at his first attempt; and besides I have some little curiosity to see Waterbridge itself—one hears a great deal about it.”

“Most probably—it has a reputation which, I fear will hardly be appreciated by Mr. Avondale. My friend FitzHenry speaks very highly indeed of you, sir.”

Some further conversation took place as to the proceedings of the following days, the committee, &c., and then they separated.

Next morning Avondale accompanied by Mr. Taylor and Stuart Jardine, started on his pere-

grinations. The undertaking after a while became more monotonous than agreeable. His address had been well posted, and it being known that Rosse and Taylor had given him their assistance, he was well received by the better class. He had some difficulty in making it understood that he came forward as an independent Liberal, a supporter, though not an adherent of Mr. Maitland, unconnected with Mulgrave, opposed to the Tories, and averse to Radicalism. The introductions were much of the same kind throughout.

First it was Mr. Johnson, Methodist, linen-draper, who had a dreadful horror of the Puseyites, and who thought it incumbent upon the Government immediately to contrive some means for putting down their machinations, “which, sir, are tending to subvert the kingdom, and will soon, if not stopped—you may take the experience of an old man for it—(he had never been 10 miles from Waterbridge)—bring England again under the Pope. You should see what they are doing at the new Church, Mr. A—A—Appleby; it is just idolatry.” (At the new Church the parson preached in his surplice, and a few flowers

were placed on the Communion table.) Of course, Avondale expressed his hatred, and that not feigned, of Ritualists, and thereupon Mr. Johnson promised he would, at least, attend a meeting to hear his opinions at length. Next it was Mr. Clarke, a bookseller, and one of the Churchwardens at the new Church. He disliked Dissenters as cordially as his neighbour did the Puseyites—out of his business, that is—in it he made no distinction, and would supply a customer as willingly with “Dr. Watts” as with “Hymns Ancient and Modern.” It was not difficult for Avondale to convince Mr. Clarkethattheir opinions on religious matters were precisely similar.

A few more visits and they came to a pair of high doors which, evidently, from the constant uproar resounding within, formed the entrance to an iron foundry.

“You must secure this vote, Mr. Avondale,” said his conductor. “Tom Radford commands more votes—honest votes—than any one else in the town. He is a shrewd old fellow, who has risen from nothing, and who worked in early life in many parts of England. He is great on engineering, and

perhaps you can get round him on that point. He is a Radical to the aristocracy and a Tory to trade-unionism." They went into the yard and encountered the proprietor in his shirt sleeves, directing half-a-dozen men who were shifting some pipes. His features were hard, but not repelling, his grizzled locks told that nigh sixty summers had passed over him, but his eye was bright, and his lips set resolutely, and his whole appearance proclaimed him one of those men who have built up their own fortunes and at the same time built up the England of the present day.

"Mornin', Mr. Taylor," he said shortly, "mornin', gentlemen."

"My friends would like to look over your works, if you have no objection, Mr. Radford," said Mr. Taylor.

"None at all, if they can find anything worth seeing."

"I have been telling them how twenty years ago your place was nothing but a smithy, and a heap of tumble down houses"—rather a cram this of Mr. Taylor—"and they wish to see your creation, and to hear how you got together skilful workmen in such a town as ours."

“Pooh, Mr. Taylor; you are coming it too strong. I always suspect a lawyer’s good opinion, and I dare say now one of these gentlemen is your new candidate?” and he gave Avondale a keen glance, as much as to say “you are the man.”

“Ah, Radford, it is no use trying to come round you,” replied Taylor, as he introduced his two companions. “I might have known you would guess our errand, for your cuteness has passed into a proverb.”

Radford smiled grimly, and the lawyer and Avondale were both assured that they had secured a hearing with him.

“But the new candidate would really much like to inspect the establishment.”

“Yes, sir, I take a great interest in engineering,” said Avondale.

“Glad to hear it, sir,” said Radford; “and hope if you get into the House you will keep up your liking.”

From engineering the conversation turned to mining and ironworks, with which Avondale was well acquainted, and, as a consequence, made a favourable impression on Radford; and then to

workmen, trades-unions, and strikes, against the latter of which Radford was particularly hot.

“You see that man there with the big hammer? Well, his wages run to 50s. a week. He is skilful and strong, but given to drink. He is never here Monday, and would be in tatters if I did not keep back quarter of his money, and give it to his wife, a nice, hard-working woman as any man could have. Then look at that thin-featured little fellow. He wants education of a different sort. He has his head crammed full of trades-union humbug; thinks every master a tyrant. He is a quick, useful chap, but always trying to overreach you. However, as long as he does not spout in my shops, I don’t mind. He won’t vote for you, whoever else does.”

All this while Mr. Radford had been accompanying his visitors through the different sheds, and pointing out the most interesting features. Returned to the office—

“Now, Mr. Avondale, we will say a few words about your election, which, I dare say, will anyhow, just now, be most to your mind. But I am rather thirsty, and I suppose you are the same.”

He took out of a cupboard four or five glasses,

of a size seldom seen, save in the houses of some old toppers. Avondale absolutely shuddered at them, feeling that he could not refuse the enormous draught without giving offence, but feeling equally certain that the effort would entail a splitting headache for the rest of the day. Jardine, however, being, from his cricket proclivities, more enured to Bass and Burton, was amused at his friend's dismay, though he was not altogether free from mental disturbance when he considered that it was not yet noon, and that if these were their host's ordinary drinking utensils he might be inclined to replenish them more than once. Radford filled three of the vessels—glasses would be a misnomer.

“You won't take anything, Mr. Taylor, I suppose. You lawyers are always afraid of the cup handle.”

“No, thanks—but don't forget that Mr. Avondale is a lawyer too—a barrister;” replied Taylor, commiserating the latter's distress.

“Is he? Well, he will, no doubt, drink success at his own election.”

Thereupon he drained his glass, refilled, and immediately began to guage his visitor's political

principles. They agreed on most points—Education—the Church, though Radford was a Dissenter—better administration of the Poor Law—reduction of military and naval expenditure—but, while Avondale wished to improve the House of Lords, Radford would abolish it altogether. He was great, too, on Emigration, and thought it the only real means of elevating the lower class. Knew Rowe and Jardine well enough by name, and considered it fortunate they were in the House ; was much pleased when he learnt that he was talking with a son of the latter, and, for the rest of the interview, showed himself much more favourably disposed towards Avondale. An hour quickly flew by, and the one o'clock bell sounded for the dinner hour.

“ Well, gentlemen, I won't keep you longer, as you have many calls to make, unless you will have some of Figgs' 'taters and bacon with me. Figgs won't vote for you, Mr. Avondale, unless you can get round his wife. I will attend your meeting—to-morrow evening, at seven, I think you said, Taylor? I will support you if I can, at least against that ass Starrett. I would put up against him myself if no one else came forward.

Take another glass—why, you have not finished the second yet. But I dare say I am more used to it than you. Hard work of all kinds, hot and cold, wet and dusty, have seasoned me, though I hate drunkenness as much as a canting tee-totaller.”

When they got into the street, Taylor said joyfully—

“We have done a good day’s work. I believe he is secured, and if so, and the voting is fairly carried out, he would turn the scale. Come on, we will lunch at Irving’s, and tell him how you are getting on. Radford’s ale was more than enough for you, but he is no drunkard; though, for the matter of that, it is doubtful if he could get drunk. You look done up, but the foundry itself is hot and dusty, and a wash will put you to rights again.”

Radford’s works were in the suburbs, close to the river, and almost out of the town. Mr. Irving’s house was a little farther on. He had just begun lunch, and was glad to see his visitors. Avondale cooled his head in the wash-hand basin, and rapidly recovered himself at lunch, under the badinage of Mr. Irving and his family,

so that before the meal was over the evil effects of Mr. Radford's hospitality had passed away.

"So you did not find hard-headed Tom such a bear, after all?" asked Mr. Irving.

"Not in the least, sir. He was most genial; in fact, a little too much so."

"He brought out those formidable goblets," explained Taylor.

"Did he now?" laughed Irving. "It was a favourable token. He brought out one of them for Rose once."

"He did not, papa," exclaimed Miss Rose. "It is too bad of you to say so. But he did offer me £5 for my old women's club, which is more than I got anywhere else; and when I said a sovereign would be sufficient, he told me at least to take a couple."

"I think he has many sterling good qualities," said Avondale.

"Not the least doubt of it," said Mr. Irving. "Had his stars been slightly more favourable he would have been another James Watt, or George Stephenson; though, perhaps, that is saying almost too much. It is not so much genius that he has, as bull-dog determination, and English

common sense. He has made a fortune in the last few years, and his business would fetch a good round sum. He owns, too, parts of several collieries across the bay, in Siluria. He has three sons—the eldest is with a civil engineer in London, the second is at Cambridge, and the youngest he intends, I think, to keep at home. I should not be in the least surprised if he were to come forward himself, some fine day, for Parliament.”

“He said, half joking, he would oppose Starrett if no one else did.”

“I am not surprised at it. He considers Starrett a ranting demagogue—and so he is—trying to win the poorer voters by cringing, and, where that will not answer, by bribery. Radford is almost Republican on some points, but he thinks the franchise is too low, and he hates corruption. He has many fine traits, and the finest, perhaps, is, that if he is hard-headed in driving a bargain, he is equally hard-headed in keeping his promise.”

“And he is not hard-hearted, papa,” said Miss Irving. “You know the Methodist Schools are, in a great part, kept up by him; and he almost

maintains all the old and sick people in any way connected with his workmen."

"I suppose," asked Taylor, "we had better have the meeting at the Royal George? The Tories are there this evening, and, of course, Brown will be equally willing to let us have the room to-morrow."

"Yes, it will be best for a preliminary assembly. Of course we shall not muster very strongly, no need to do so at first, only just enough to form a committee, and so on. I have seen Jackson and one or two others this morning. By the by, do you think Everett will really put up?"

"I believe so. I dare say it will be settled to-night. If he does there will be warm work, though I don't imagine he has any chance. Starrett will, probably, secure a seat, while the other will be between Mulgrave and our friend. Everett will not unlikely petition, and so save us, in case of defeat, the invidious task; but the *exposée* will be something dreadful."

"From the bottom of my heart, I hope he will," exclaimed Irving. "The majority of the constituency are rotten to the core, and ought to be shown up. But what annoys me, more than

anything, is that my own workmen tell me—and other employers the same—almost to my face, that capitalists are tyrannical, and exacting, and harsh, and God knows what else, and at their prayer meetings the snuffling hypocrites laud themselves for their saintliness and humility, while they hold us up as children of the devil on the sure road to perdition, and, yet, when election comes round, the sanctimonious scoundrels will take bribes from two candidates, and, at the last moment, will pocket another sum from a third, and perhaps finally vote for a fourth. Excuse my speaking rather warmly, Mr. Avondale.”

“I fully understand your feelings,” said the latter. “I thoroughly respect good, honest dissent, but self-righteousness and bigotry are altogether a different matter.”

“I am afraid,” interrupted Taylor, “we must ask Mrs. Irving to excuse our running away. We must see a few more people this afternoon, as to-morrow, being market, they will be then engaged.”

“Quite right—don’t let us detain you. But don’t forget Figs, Mr. Avondale,” said Mr.

Irving, referring to a local oddity in the shape of an alderman who, some six months previously, when a municipal debate had lasted to two o'clock, asked—"Mr. Major, had we better put this off and go home before the 'taters and bacon get gold?"

"And, please Mr. Taylor, don't allow Mr. Avondale to forget Mr. and Mrs. Snooks and daughters," added Miss Rose, laughing maliciously at the solicitor.

"Of course not, my dear young lady; and I won't forget to introduce him to the interesting Curate at the new church, who has such melancholy eyes, and such a lovely voice," replied the latter, paying her back in her own coin.

CHAPTER III.

THE afternoon was but a repetition of the morning's proceedings, and varied not in the slightest from what every would-be member goes through. Avondale proved himself such an adept in the art of canvassing as to surprise his guide. Patiently listening to the "experience" of one worthy citizen, astonished at the wisdom of another, commiserating the indigestion of a third, convinced by the masterly reasoning of a fourth, grave with the serious, pleased with the sportive, gay with the witty, agreeing with most, differing from few, contradicting none, he manifested such a thorough acquaintance with the theory and practice of humbug as is usually acquired only after years spent in the "service of one's country," and in the business of life; and he left such an impression on most of his hearers as would need for its effacement, the influence of an agent still more potent than mere flattery, of

an agent whose efficacy, openly declared at Waterbridge, is acknowledged not ambiguously in many other quarters. The interview with the Snookses was an interesting, though in a different way as that with Mr. Radford. Mr. Taylor left them at the gate leading into the lawn—the house being a few yards back from the road—having promised to dine with them at six o'clock, and saying that when they got inside they would, doubtless, understand why he, a single man, found it necessary to go back to his office.

Our two friends were shown into a drawing-room which seemed, though the thermometer outside stood at ninety degrees, to strike chill. There was a coldness and stiffness about the arrangement of the furniture, the disposition of music on the piano, and the display of prints and sketches on the walls, which instantaneously affected the visitor. Nor did the beauty of the sketches remove this feeling. Amongst them figured conspicuously a “Water girl,” bony and gaunt, by Rosa Maria Snooks ; a “Dog’s head,” more resembling a mop, by Jemima Sarah Snooks ; a “Vase,” ready to tumble over, by Dorothy Jane Snooks ; a “Lady’s head,” fright-

fully squinting, by Adelina Mary Ann Snooks ; a " Landscape," all dirty sky and muddy water, by Tabitha Rachel Snooks ; a " Man and Horse," said man considerably stouter than the horse, by Maud Ellen Ruth Snooks ; a something—a river—or perhaps a road—with a boat—or a carriage—lying across it, by Bathsheba Hester Snooks.

" By Jove," said Jardine, " this looks decidedly more serious than Radford's ale. I vote we cut, Walter."

They had waited about ten minutes, during which there had been a terrible amount of opening and shutting of doors, when the rustling of dresses announced the approach of their receivers. In they filed in long procession. "*Quel troupeau !*" muttered Avondale, while trying to assume a smile which would degenerate into a sardonic grin. First came a woman with the wrinkled face of sixty, and the hair and chignon of five-and-twenty. She announced herself as Mrs. Snooks, bobbed a curtsy to Avondale and Jardine in turn, said she was delighted with the h—h—honour of their call, and then proceeded to introduce each after each her " dahters," from

Tabitha Rachel, a simpering lass of thirty-six, down to Maud Ellen Ruth, a sullen-looking vixen of seventeen. The somewhat lengthened ceremony over, the party seated themselves with the apparent intention of remaining so for some time. Avondale, learning that the paterfamilias was not at home, tried to get away, but in vain—Mr. Snooks would be in directly, wished much to see Mr. Avondale, and would be quite angry if he missed the opportunity—and so the latter was, perforce, compelled to wait. Conversation did not flag, though it was not altogether of an enlivening character. The ladies divided their attentions pretty equally. Jemima, Sarah, Dorothy Jane, and Adelina Mary Ann fixed upon Jardine, while the others fluttered around Avondale. In this case our hero, from his experience of Mrs. and the Misses Simpkinses, had as much the advantage of Jardine as the latter had of him in respect of the ale in the morning.

After a few remarks, Miss Tabitha asked “If Mr. Taylor had not accompanied them?”

“Yes,” said Avondale; “but he had to go back to the office. He was very sorry, and

wished me to convey to you his regrets for being unable to remain."

"That is just like him," replied Miss Tabitha. "He is always paying me some compliment or other. At our bazaar in May, for the Sunday school, he said my hair was the most beautiful in the town, and that I ought to cut it off and sell it for the charity."

The woman is surely slightly crazy thought Avondale.

"You mistake, Tabitha," objected Bathsheba Hester. "He said mine was much more glossy than yours."

"Oh, no, my dear, you forget. What he said was that yours is so thin, that if it were really glossy it would not fetch anything."

"Mr. Taylor is very underhand—I don't like him at all," said Rosa Maria. "He told Mr. de Hautville that you both would believe any amount of nonsense."

Here, while Avondale was looking amazed at the *tres amicæ sorores*, and secretly rejoicing at the prospect of a general scrimmage, the mother interposed.

“ ‘Ave you seen Mr. dee Ovell yet, Mr. Happleprie—Mr. Havondale, I mean ; I forgot—I ’ave just been making a gooseberry pie, and so the word came sudden into my mouth. He is a nice young man, with such heyeyes ; he’s fell in love, so people say, with our Maria.”

“ Oh, mamma,” ejaculated Maria, trying to blush.

“ I am not at all surprised at his choice,” said Avondale. “ It would, indeed, be a wonder if he had not”—at which somewhat strong dose of flattery Maria did colour a little, while Tabitha and Bathsheba appeared inclined to scratch said Maria.

Meanwhile poor Jardine was in agony. He felt himself in the hands of Gorgons, and had seriously, two or three times, meditated a rush for the door. At last he unconsciously alluded to music, when Jemima Sarah, a damsel stout, though short, whose age might be anything under forty, incontinently volunteered to favour him with a song, and, ere he could object, had taken possession of the music-stool, and was asking what he would like.

“ ‘The Bridge,’ Mr. Jardine? But that

sounds better at night. Or ‘Home they brought her Warrior dead,’ or ‘I am the Spirit of Light?’ ”

“Yes, dear,” said her mother, who kept her eye on both sides like a general watching the two wings of his army, “Mr. Garden would be sure to like that.”

Then to Jardine, “My daughter has sung that song several times at our concerts, and the folks do like it so. She is romantic and lively, and throws such empathy into it. Go on, Jemima,” and Jemima did go on.

(Prestissimo.)

“Oh, I am the spirit of li——ght!
And I come with the dawning day,”

(Very prestissimo.)

“To scatter the dews, and gladness diffu——se,
As I speed on my joyous wa——y!!!”

It would be impossible to describe the performance. The first and third lines were got over at a frightful rate, and the second and fourth at scarcely less speed, the last word “way” taking up as much time as all the rest together. The pitch, too, varied in a wonderful manner, the greater part of each verse being screamed out in shrillest treble, but the voice at the end dropping down into a low bass, melodious as the final yelp

of a bad-tempered dog sleeping in the open air on a raw cold winter's night. Avondale and Jardine listened astounded, longing, though not venturing, to stop their ears, but their bewilderment being mistaken for approbation, aroused in the breasts of the other Graces hot feelings of envy, and ere the singer had concluded she was ejected from her seat and replaced in turn by the others, till the stock of songs was exhausted. Then the "drawings" and the "work" were brought out. The time ran rapidly. Six o'clock sounded, the hour appointed for their dinner. The unfortunate adventurers were in despair; they had made repeated attempts to get off, but to no purpose, and it seemed they would have to await Snooks' return, whenever that might be. To add to their discomfiture the tea-things now made their appearance, and they had the pleasure of waiting upon the eight beauties.

"Mon Dieu!" muttered Avondale to Jardine, "Que peut se faire? Je meurs de faim; et celles-ci, Diable les emporte!"

At last, a few minutes after half-past six, a note was brought Avondale. He read it hurriedly.

“Extremely sorry, Mrs. Snooks, to be obliged to tear myself away, but Mr. Taylor wants me at once. He has some gentlemen wishing to see me, so that I cannot stay. Good evening.”

The ladies were plunged into sorrow.

“But Mr. Jardine is not wanted too?”

“I suppose not,” said Avondale maliciously, but intending to keep his friend there only a few minutes longer for the sake of the joke. Then bowing to the whole tribe, he disappeared, rejoicing like a man who has just finished six months on the treadmill.

At the “Royal George” Taylor received Avondale with an expression of countenance that told plainly enough he had been enjoying himself with the thoughts of how the latter had spent the afternoon.

“My dear sir, you do not seem over pleased with your last call. I am afraid they have been treating you badly ; but where is Mr. Jardine?”

“Oh, I left him behind for the fun of it—said you did not want him, and that he need not therefore withdraw himself from such interesting company. Poor fellow, his situation during the last two hours has been about as agreeable as

that of an Indian at the stake while his foes are heaping up the wood round him preparatory to the fire; and then the look he gave me, half horror, half abjection, as I escaped from the den. It was really too good," and Avondale laughed heartily, consoling himself for his own recent misery with the idea of the still greater torture his friend was now undergoing. Recovering himself in a minute or two—

"It won't do to leave Stuart there any longer, or he will never forgive me. He will go crazy and jump out of the window or do something equally rash. You must scribble another note, Mr. Taylor."

"How could you have been so cruel, Mr. Avondale. 'A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind,' is the saying, but it seems to have hardened your heart. Poor Mr. Jardine, it is too bad. One young man in the hands of eight females. I presume you were so lucky as to meet with the whole lot? and such females! An hour in their company would be penance enough to atone for a year's sins. Poor Mr. Jardine, we won't keep him there longer."

He touched the bell, asked for some paper, and

wrote the necessary release. But before it was sealed, in burst the object of their solicitations. He executed a maniacal dance round the room as a *pas de joie*, seizing one chair as a partner, upsetting several others in his progress, then jumped over the table, and finally squared up to Avondale.

“Now, sir, are you not ashamed of yourself? And what excuses would you have made to my revered parents if the result of your detestable machinations had been to land me in a lunatic asylum?”

Without waiting for a reply he went through a similar series of evolutions, while Taylor and Avondale laughed uproariously at his antics, concluding with an attempt at a break-down dance, and then at length seating himself through sheer exhaustion in an easy chair.

“Well, Mr. Walter Avondale, M.P. in prospective of the honourable borough of Waterbridge, what have you to say why I should not summon you to give more full and complete satisfaction?”

“I am very sorry, Stuart, if you will believe me. But it will be such a fine joke for Mary

that I could not avoid playing it on you. You looked so thoroughly woe-begone with Jemima Tabitha on one side and Bathsheba Dorcas on the other," and the speaker went off into another fit of laughter.

"Never mind, Mr. Jardine," said Taylor, "you must make a few strange experiences before you get full knowledge of character. We had, however, just written a note for you, here it is. But how did you get away; what excuse did you contrive?"

"None at all. The door was left open; I managed to get round near it, and then rushed out; I ran like wild down the lawn, and jumped the gate at the bottom as it seemed to be locked, and I was afraid I should be retaken, and hastened here at once."

"But that is not the hat you were wearing this morning; you have brought away some other person's."

"I forgot. I was in such a hurry that I could not stop to search for my own, and so I turned into the first shop. The people looked astonished at me, thought I was an escaped lunatic, I suppose. Do I appear much like one? I bought a

felt hat as it is much lighter than a high crowner this weather."

"There was a rather wild expression about your eyes as you came in, but it is gone now."

"Glad to hear you say so. But it is no joking matter. I should positively have lost my senses if those female torturers had kept me another hour—ugh! I am wretchedly hungry, and so was Walter just now."

"Dinner will be up directly. I took the liberty on my way to the office of ordering it for you at half-past six, feeling sure how matters would turn out. I came here at a quarter-past, and as you were not in, I directed the host to bring it up a little before seven, and here it comes. You will find it good. Host Brown has a wide reputation for his cuisine, and he will be on his mettle to win the approbation of two London swells."

"His efforts will be lost on me, though I certainly shall appreciate anything in the shape of food. I am grimed with dust and perspiration; do you know the way to our room, Walter?"

A short space sufficed for their toilette, and

they sat down to a dinner which bore high testimony to the merits of Host Brown's cook, and to which hunger enabled them to do ample justice. As soon as the keenness of the appetite had been taken off, conversation which had flagged was again renewed. It turned almost inevitably on the Snookses, and each was bantered in turn by the other two. Jardine received the first attack, and Taylor exploded with merriment at Avondale's description of the desperate efforts he had made to look amused, of the song Miss Jemima sang for his especial behoof, and of the "emputy," alias emphasis, she threw into it, and finally of the ghastly smile he put on while handing round the cake and tea, at the hour appointed for their own dinner. Next Mr. Taylor was told how deeply interested the two eldest daughters were in him, and how his neat compliments at the bazaar had been treasured up, and had well-nigh led to a fight between the two favoured beauties.

"Confound their impudence," he exclaimed savagely, "I never said half-a-dozen words to the lot. But what was that about Mr. Ovell?

Tell me again ; it will be of service for paying off Miss Rose Irving."

Avondale was almost impregnable. The most salient point in his armour was the new name "Happlepie," with which Mrs. Snooks had dubbed him.

"Didn't the sweet cherubs look disgusted when she informed us she had been making a gooseberry pie?" said Jardine. "The half-closed eyes of one—Maria Rachel, I think—shut completely. Hester's or Dorothy's turned-up nose went into a more decided curl. Dorcas' left optic, always on ill terms with its neighbour, made a half face to the left, while the other performed a similar evolution to the right, the result on the whole being somewhat remarkable. Then Tabitha's delicate expostulation—'Ma, we are not now engaged in culinary operations!' was excellent. Thackeray ought to have made the acquaintance of such a family."

"Who are these people?" asked Avondale.

"The father is a corn-dealer," replied Taylor ; "a most respectable and sensible man, as is his eldest son, who is in partnership with him. He came into the town five or six years ago. He had

previously rented a mill at Mayford, four miles up the river. He did a good business there, but these foolish women would come here to get husbands. Their success in that line has not been very great yet, but they put the old man to expense, more I think than he can well bear, and I should not be in the least surprised if he had to shift back to the mill, which he has still kept on."

Dinner over and a bottle of Brown's oldest Madeira discussed, Taylor proposed that they should walk out to Mr. Rosse's, to give him an account of the day's work. He was very glad to see them, and Avondale had plainly got up considerably in his estimation. A rather numerous company had assembled to talk over what would be for the next week or two the engrossing topic. Avondale aroused the goodwill, even of those who were inclined to object to his youth, and his narrative of his canvassing created much amusement. Radford was considered by one and all an important ally. Everything for the next evening's meeting was arranged, and the names of those willing to act on the committee were put down.

“You had better dine at the ‘King William,’ to-morrow,” said Captain Wright, a small landed proprietor in the neighbourhood. “It is the farmer’s house of call, and a good many of them have votes, as the boundaries of the borough go out into the country. I will, if you like, go with you, and introduce you to some of them, though I think most of them will go for either Everett, the Tory, or Starrett, the butterman.”

Avondale expressed his thanks, and thus the morrow’s course was settled.

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE the middle of the next day Mr. Everett's address was out. He lived at Moreton Grange, some miles north of Waterbridge, and was the owner of a large portion of the country surrounding the town, but in it he had comparatively little direct influence. A town lying in a rich agricultural district could not, however, be free from Tory predilections ; his father had been, up till his death, five years previously, one of its representatives. He had, as already mentioned, contested the last election with Percy Mulgrave, with the sole result of adding to the mass of corruption in which the borough was steeped. He now came forward again "invited to do so by a very numerous signed requisition. He was a thorough supporter of the union of Church and State, but was equally anxious to see the same political privileges extended to deserving persons of every grade in society, and of all religious

views—and so on, and so on,” *a la* the manifesto drawn out by Baker, Thorn, Southton, and Co., for the guidance of sucking politicians entrusted to their care and direction.

So many attended Avondale's meeting that it was necessary to adjourn from the private room, which it was thought would have sufficed, to the much more commodious ball-room. Mr. Rosse introduced him, and expressed his own surprise and pleasure at the large number who had, on such a short notice, come together. He referred to Avondale's ancestors, mentioned the share several had taken in the politics of their day, stated briefly his career at college, and concluded by declaring he had resolved to confine his disbursements to strictly legitimate expenses—words which elicited general cheering.

Avondale got up. He felt rather nervous, but his nerves were always under the control of his cool head, and especially he knew how greatly his whole future would depend on the way he now comported himself, and the expressions to which he gave utterance. His manly figure, easy bearing, and intellectual face, paler than usual, but illumined by the light in his eyes, won for

him a sympathetic audience, and their attention deepened as his speech proceeded. After very shortly apologising for his youth, but reminding his hearers of the great men whose youth had been so renowned, he described generally the present state of politics. He ran over the history of our country during the last few years, considered in connection with the history of foreign countries with whose interests our own have been in conflict, or unisance. This enabled him to mark the comparative advance or retrogression we had made, to point where foreign policy had erred or succeeded, and to comment upon the position we now held in the opinion of the world at large. Then he reviewed, one by one, the various social questions more or less imperatively demanding legislation, commenting upon the urgency and importance of each, and pointing out the best modes of dealing with them. Next he took up the relations, in many respects unsatisfactory, existing between the different parts of the empire, and especially between the mother country and the colonies. He strongly upheld the need of tightening, and not relaxing, the bonds joining them—alluding, in passing, to the

fact that on his left was a son of Mr. Jardine, one of the best known Australian statesmen—dwelt on the need we have of a refuge for our surplus population, urged that the colonies, if not allies, might easily become carping rivals, and depicted the vast empire which in the future might be built up on existing foundations, an empire which would be a sure guarantee that freedom should not be without a protector. Out of these materials he evolved a line of policy which he thought Parliament ought to pursue; then sketched the attitude of the two great parties, and showed there was much ground for complaint in the tenets of each; said he would give a general, but independent support to the Maitland Ministry; and sat down, after a speech of an hour and half's duration, which was often interrupted by cheering, and was loudly applauded at its close.

Mr. Irving proposed a resolution, stating that the assembly were fully satisfied with Mr. Avondale's sentiments, and that they accorded him their support, and would strive to place him at the head of the poll. He said he fully concurred in every word his friend had spoken, and was

equally surprised and gratified at the intimate acquaintance with history and general politics his speech evinced, and at the ease and fluency with which it had been delivered. He was also greatly pleased with the statement made by Mr. Rosse, and which, of course, Mr. Avondale would directly confirm before they broke up, that the contest was to be carried on throughout with the determination, whatever might be the result, of not spending one halfpenny but in a manner allowed by law.

Mr. Benton, a banker and borough magistrate, seconded the resolution, in a short speech that but reiterated what Mr. Irving had already said.

Mr. Radford also gave it his adhesion. His rising was the signal for much applause, for his good qualities were thoroughly appreciated by his fellow burgesses, while, as he never joined in the parliamentary or municipal contest, his appearance on this occasion added weight to his authority. He also fully concurred in most of Avondale's speech. But, beyond this he hardly considered the gentleman had done himself justice. His knowledge of the internal resources of the nation was not inferior to his familiarity

with bygone generations, or foreign political plottings; and then he gave an account of yesterday's conversation. He (Radford) thought the former information was quite as important as the latter, while, as a rule, M.P.s were profoundly ignorant of it. He then spoke very sharply of the scandalous practices that had occurred at some elections, and rejoiced to hear that this would be, at least on one side, untainted by bribery—indeed, under any other circumstances he would not have had anything to do with it.

Four or five others having spoken to the same effect, the resolution was put, and, of course, carried unanimously.

Avondale thanked the meeting for their patient hearing, and for the encouragement they had given him, and explained that he had forborne to say how he had resolved to conduct his canvass till it was settled he should come forward. He could add nothing to what Mr. Rosse had said at the commencement, and it was altogether unnecessary to do so—the mere circumstance of Messrs. Rosse and Taylor being his agents would be a sufficient proof to all that one pure election would be attempted at Waterbridge.

Mr. Rosse then advised that a committee be formed, and the majority present gave in their names. They composed a list strong in respectability and position, but, as Avondale and his solicitors and active supporters were fully aware, the smaller voters at Waterbridge far outnumbered the better class, and it was they who on every occasion finally decided the return.

It was past ten ere the meeting separated. The night mail left a little before eleven, and by it Avondale and Jardine returned to London. He thanked Irving, Radford, and the solicitors most heartily for their assistance, placed all other arrangements in the hands of the latter, and promised, nothing preventing, to come down again on Tuesday, and remain till the fight was over.

CHAPTER V.

Our two friends reached London by four o'clock, just as the summer sun was rising. They went to Mr. Jardine's, and after three or four hours' sound sleep, made their appearance at the breakfast-table, none the worse for the ride. Miss Avondale had come up on the preceding Thursday, in accordance with the prior arrangements. She was in good health, enjoying her visit, and had already won the favourable opinion of her hosts. All the family were anxious to hear an account of the proceedings; and Avondale did his best to satisfy their curiosity. He was at all times an excellent narrator, and he did not now fail. The ladies were naturally inquisitive on every point. The town itself, its situation and neighbourhood, its streets and public buildings had to be sketched. Then Messrs. Rosse and Taylor, Irving and Radford, and the other prominent electors, whose acquaintance they had

made, were passed in review. Finally came the inevitable Snookses—Avondale could not omit them—and then the laughter aroused by the general relation, culminated in most indecorous peals, as he depicted the utter desolation manifested by Jardine when left helpless and alone in the hands of his persecutors, and how in a few minutes he made his escape, regardless of all propriety, fleeing hatless and vaulting the gate, in dread lest he should be retaken. Merciless was the bantering Jardine received, but he took it all in good part, and to some extent turned the tables on Avondale, by describing the latter's terror at the appearance of Mr. Radford's big glasses, and how, to conciliate the favour of such a supporter, he had striven manfully to swallow the mighty potation offered him.

As Avondale left, Mr. Jardine accompanied him to the door to have an opportunity of questioning him as to what were his real prospects of success.

“ Very good, if the election is to be decided honestly, but I fear that will not be the case.”

“ These solicitors are, of course, men of good standing? ”

“ Yes, undoubtedly, the best in the town.

FitzHenry was right in what he said of them. They evidently carry with them all the better sort, and have thus given me, at once, a fair position."

"And Starrett—what of him?"

"He is a member of Riston and Co., provision merchants in the city. Perhaps you know them? They do a large business with the farmers about Waterbridge. He is, himself, also owner of several coasting smacks. Thus he has a double hold on the borough; and as he has an easy flow of words and is willing to promise the populace everything they ask him, and perhaps will not stop at spending money, he will certainly secure many of the lowest votes, and, if not elected, will run the successful candidate very close."

"Mulgrave—what is his chance?"

"I can scarcely say. I have not had time enough to form an opinion. But he will go with Starrett; perhaps they will coalesce and have one committee. He is a Minister, that will carry some weight; but he has no personal influence, and it is beyond question, that a petition against his last election would have unseated him. The Conservative will, I think, be last, though not

far behind. Many of his votes, Rosse says, will be given to me. Altogether it must be a sharp fight, and I imagine no very great majority will separate him who heads the poll from him who comes last."

"Very likely. I wish you all success, and many others do the same. Your coming forward has created much interest and has been a pretty general topic of conversation the last few days. Mulgrave's appointment has produced much ill-will. He is considered, and, with justice, an incapable, and it is to his wife's machinations that it is attributed. If you can oust him, you won't have to complain of lack of congratulation. Well, good morning, I must not detain you. Stay ; Head is to be put over the Home Office."

"What, Blocke Head ! a more incapable man than Mulgrave, who left the education business in such a muddle for Herbert Williams to clear up."

"Yes, and Sloe will take the Board of Trade, Grantham making way for him by going to the Poor Law Department—and, and—what else ? Our good friend Mordaunt Tracy steps into

Mulgrave's shoes. You see the world has not stopped while you have been out of town."

"No, sir, evidently not. Is all this positively settled?"

"Not quite, but it will be this afternoon, and very probably it is stated semi-officially in to-day's 'Times.'"

Ruminating upon this intelligence, Avondale went off to his chambers, and then to Warfedale House. At Hyde Park Corner, he met the Earl of Wyversley.

"I have been wandering half over town for you," said the young Earl, "I went to your place early, and then, as you were not there, I thought there might be a chance you would be at Jardine's. They sent me on here, and so I have stumbled on you at last. I want an account of your adventures. By Jove! from the papers, I imagine you have been doing grand things. Stuart Jardine has been with you, too, he says. I am so ashamed of hanging about idle that I shall go down, when you return, to join *incog.* in an election. I imagine the whole affair must be amusing."

“I hope you will, but I fear you will soon tire of it.”

“Oh, no, and if I did, it could not last long; not more than a fortnight at the outside.”

“Besides, I was forgetting—it would be a breach of privilege on your part.”

“So it would; I forgot that. I hope you will cut out Mulgrave. What is your chance?”

“Well, as matters are, not good. I believe I should certainly be elected if bribery were dropped; but, if the other side adopt that line, they can have enough votes to secure their return. If they do, of course the power is given one of petitioning.”

“I trust, then, you will petition, or some one for you. It would be even better to get Mulgrave turned out after election, than for him to be directly defeated. His wife is such an overbearing woman, pushing herself forward everywhere. You know who she was? Lady Wharfedale would be delighted to see her dignity in any way lowered. And that reminds me the Marquis wishes you to call on him when you return. Can you come to-night?”

“I suppose so, after dinner. I am engaged at

the Jardines'. I was going there now. But I am somewhat doubtful about going in the evening again without invitation. The Marquis may think me obtruding, and perhaps be inclined to snub me."

"Make yourself easy on that, my dear fellow. Of course, if he expected you to dinner, he would send you a formal invitation; and then, no doubt, he would have written, had he been certain when you would return. But now, he wishes you to come when most convenient in the morning, or late in the evening, after dinner. I will call for you — when will you be ready, ten o'clock, at Mr. Jardine's.

"Yes."

"That is settled then. You have heard the news; but here is one of the new dignitaries, Mordaunt Tracy."

Tracy stopped and shook hands with them. He was apparently as anxious to talk with Avondale as some time previously he had been to pass him by. He congratulated him on the result of his canvass, and presumed that, with Mr. Mulgrave's assistance, he would have a good chance of election. Avondale "had not the pleasure of

the honourable gentleman's acquaintance, and was not aware his elevation to a higher post was decided on."

"Yes. His address was out last evening. But you were so occupied with your meeting as not to hear anything about it. According to the telegram, you will be an addition to the debating power in the House. By the by, is Mr. Fitz-Henry's influence of much benefit at Waterbridge?"

"What do you mean?"

"I thought he was bringing you forward. Your agents there are friends of his, are they not?"

"I really cannot comprehend, Mr. Tracy, what you are asking," said Avondale rather warmly. "My solicitors have likely enough business connections with Mr. FitzHenry. His reputation is sufficient to secure him a client in every town. As to his bringing me forward, if you took the trouble to read my address, you will see that I am distinctly independent both as to political party and to local aid. I am fighting my own battle. Mr. FitzHenry would no more think of appearing as my champion, than he would of ex-

pressing his opinion as to the stability of the present Government, or to the foresight displayed by those who are now joining it."

Tracy bit his lips, and, after some commonplace remarks anent the weather, passed on.

"Very good, Walter," said Wyversley, laughing; "you hit him rather hard at the last. But you should have drawn him out a little more; and you did not either congratulate him on his taking silk, as you lawyers say, or allow me the opportunity of doing so."

"I really forgot it. His patronising tone grated rather harshly, and I don't like being pumped in that manner where a few incautious words would involve others besides yourself in a mess. In fact, as any one could see, he did not want information about my election, but about the people who have given me their countenance and support."

"Served him right. I am surprised that he has joined the Government. I do not think—though my ideas on the matter are not worth much—that it will hold together through next session. You know, of course, who is to be the new President of the Board of Trade? How will

his sentiments tally with those of His Grace of Bayswater?"

"Not very closely, I imagine. There is no doubt, however, that Bayswater is of less value to Maitland than Sloe. We English have never been grand at Foreign Ministers. Somehow or other we do not seem to take kindly to international statecraft; have not naturally deceit and fraud enough in our system to deal successfully with the fellows who have grown grey-haired in the service of Russia or Austria, diplomatists who have reduced dissimulation to a science and lying to a system. Take the petty German and Italian States, for instance. They are always trying to overreach each other. A petty princelet of Hesse This or That has to maintain the dignity of an independent Sovereign, and to keep his officers of state. This is alone a costly and difficult business. Then he has to secure that his position is properly recognised at other courts, a matter requiring much tact and perseverance; and, finally, he has to make some arrangements for his sons and daughters, who, poor beggars, being of royal blood, must, forsooth, be married to creatures similarly endowed."

“Go on, Radical, I like to hear you, who have such a contempt for king mob and such a respect for hoary antiquity, practically exemplifying your doctrines by passing a level over high and low.”

“Not so. I should be the last to loosen the foundations of society; but can a multitude of royal dignitaries—not nobles simply, remember, but people constituting a distinct, separate, inaccessible class, divided by a gulf, clearly defined and impassable, from the rest of the community—can a multitude of such be a safeguard for civil order? Does not common sense tell you that the less of them the better for the world and the better for themselves? Put it to yourself: were you monarch of your own county, do you believe you would find it easy to sustain the expense of a court and the rest of the paraphernalia?”

“Not very likely. As it is, I am drifting towards bankruptcy.”

“And if England were parted out in ten or twelve sovereignties, could that conduce to its advancement and progress, or increase the comfort of its people?”

“Of course not. You know my opinion on

that is much the same as yours. But what were you saying about our Foreign Ministers?"

"We have rather wandered away from them. I was only going to add that for the last 100 years hardly one has been, as regards his particular subject, worth his salt. Palmerston was, perhaps, the best, though he has met with a vast amount of undeserved commendation. It was not skill in negotiation or prescience in the hidden causes influencing men's acts that earned for him his reputation, but solely his knowledge of England and Englishmen, and his determination to uphold, at any cost, the honour of his country. This was a sentiment which, twenty years ago, had greater weight than now with us, or his application of *civis Romanus sum* to Britons in foreign lands would not have elicited the enthusiastic cheering it did in the House of Commons, nor have drawn an equally enthusiastic response from the nation. Did you ever read that speech?"

"I? No, my dear fellow. That is almost an unnecessary question."

"It ought not to be unnecessary then. Take my advice and read it. You will find it in 'Hansard' for April, 1848, I think. The whole

lot of speeches are worth reading, especially Gladstone's, who was then a Tory and in Opposition, although he died an advanced Radical. But we have passed the Western. Let us turn back. I am rather hungry and should be glad of some lunch. It is very noticeable that bad as has been the general quality of the Foreign Ministers, the Liberals have, save Palmerston, been far worse than the Tories. You know to what a pass we have come now. Meddling here and muddling there have created on the Continent the very prevalent belief that we have not one decent diplomatist left amongst us."

"And I cannot say the belief is far wrong."

"No. Just fancy such a noodle as Head being made Home Secretary. In truth, 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' The Home Office is the most difficult department of all, and Head to be there. Ugh! Well, here we are at the Club, and I dare say we shall find some scraps of news flying about."

CHAPTER VI.

FROM the Jardines' Avondale, according to promise, accompanied Wyversley to Wharfedale House. The Marchioness was greatly delighted to see him, and deigned to tell Wyversley that for once he had evinced possession of a little memory and consideration. In a few minutes, however, the Marquis, hearing of his arrival, took him aside to learn what was the prospect of the election. Avondale told him exactly how matters stood.

"You cannot petition personally," said the Marquis, "let the bribery be as gross as it may. It would render you a marked man to start with, and it would look like a direct attack on Mulgrave."

"Of course not," assented Avondale. "But this Starrett is not liked by the better portion of the townsfolk, some of whom are really ashamed of the corruption around them. It may, there-

fore, very probably happen that if he pitches into one of my supporters too strongly, this one may petition on his own account. I think this is very likely to occur. Irving would be very glad to show up the Radicals, and so would others."

"I should not regret its being so—it would be so damaging to Maitland for one of his Cabinet to be unseated for improper conduct—not," he added, somewhat hastily, "that I have any personal feeling in the matter as regards either Maitland or Mulgrave."

"Of course not," replied Avondale, concealing a smile at the speaker's assumed indifference; "but, I presume, your lordship would not have the slightest objection to taking the direction of affairs, if so commanded by her Majesty."

"I? My dear sir, what do you mean?" ejaculated Wharfedale, with real or pretended amazement.

"Had we not better join the ladies?" asked Avondale. "Your lordship will lose your reputation for gallantry if you allow my poor affairs to occupy your attention in this renowned drawing-room."

The Marquis laughed.

“*Jouer gros jeu*, Avondale, and something must come of it. You say you leave town on Monday—no, Tuesday. I should like to have a talk with you, but I suppose I must wait till the election is over.”

Lady Wharfedale beckoned to Avondale as soon as the Marquis left him.

“Take a seat between those two ladies, if you can find room. Stay, I am forgetting; you met Mrs. de Spenser the last time you were here, but I don’t think Lady de Breaute knows you yet.” She introduced him to the stately eldest daughter of the Duke of Strathclyde. “And now you must give me an account of your adventures. I saw your speech the other day in the papers—and read it—so you may be sure how much interest I am taking in the contest.”

Avondale scarcely knew how to express his appreciation of the honour conferred by such a notice, and then went on with the account. His hearers were greatly amused by it, even Lady de Breaute, who had at first shown thorough indifference, and, indeed, a disposition to yawn. The interest increased as he proceeded, and the

smiles were followed by suppressed laughter, in which the Marquis and one or two other gentlemen, who had listened to the last part, joined unreservedly, as he described Jardine's escape from the Snookses'.

"Good, good, Mr. Avondale," exclaimed Sir Edward Wharton. "Your experience is very similar to what mine was when I first got in, fifteen or sixteen years ago, for Morham. I thought I should not survive the first attempt, but the next time I had a friend to help me, and he, being much better looking, and a capital talker, attracted the attention of the female part of the constituency—always the chief part of the fight, as the Marchioness is aware—and so both saved me a vast amount of soft speeches, and secured a number of votes."

"It is fortunate for you and me, Wharton," said the Marquis, "that the ladies are not electors. If so, we should stand no chance against such young fellows as Avondale, with their *distingué* appearance and their voluble tongues. But perhaps they will deign to favour us with a little music; has Mrs. de Spenser never a song to enliven us with?"

The lady addressed accepted Wharfedale's arm to the piano.

"Please let it be in a tongue understood by the commons," said Wharton.

" 'A southerly wind, &c.,' I suppose," Sir Edward.

"Oh, no, madam. Pray have some higher opinion of me than to think that I have no ear for anything but hunting ballads."

"I will try to satisfy you. Let me see, what do you like? Here it is, I believe—'The Night is still.'"

While the song was going on, Lady Wharfedale counselled our hero to try to secure the good graces of Lady de Breaute. The latter belonged to one of the oldest families in the kingdom. Her father was premier Duke. Five hundred years had his title been transmitted lineally down from father to son, his ancestor having been the solitary Peer who, during Elizabeth's reign, preserved his order from extinction. The first Earl of Strathelyde was one of Edward the First's bravest officers, and commanded a division of his army at Falkirk, in 1298. The

fourth Earl fought with the Black Prince seventy years later, at Najara, and was by the 3rd Edward raised to the Dukedom of Strathclyde, though, of course, it was then merely a titular dignity; he was, also, at the same time, advanced to the Earldom of Oswestry, which, as a barony, dated from the Conquest. The Duke had withdrawn from active participation in politics, as his aristocratic predilections were somewhat ruffled by finding that his chief rivals and competitors in that occupation were successful traders and manufacturers. He did not, however, altogether absent himself from Parliament, and his occasional speeches evinced a kindly disposition, if not a brilliant intellect. To his equals he was inclined to be proud and distant, but not overbearing; to his inferiors, and those in his employ, he was ever considerate; and his daughter inherited the same traits of character. She was in her 26th year, still unmarried, though certainly not from lack of offers or admirers. Her features were well-formed, and intellectual, and fixed Juno-like in calm repose, but, under the influence of Avondale's

ready tongue and delicate attention, they gradually relaxed their immobility, and their cold set became replaced by a pleasant smile.

“Who was that with the Jardines, yesterday?” asked the Marchioness of Wyversley.

“Ask Walter; he can tell you,” was the reply.

“Dear me, this is too bad,” exclaimed the questioner. “Mr. Avondale is referee in chief; but who was it? You must know; you were at Mr. Jardine’s just now.”

“It was Walter’s sister.”

“His sister! That explains how good your memory has suddenly become. I am very glad. Are there any more in the family?”

“No, I believe not.”

She congratulated Avondale on the relationship, and said she would take the earliest opportunity of calling upon Mrs. Jardine, in order to have the pleasure of making his sister’s acquaintance.

It seemed but a few short minutes more, and the company withdrew, barely saving the Sunday. Wyversley accompanied Avondale down Bond Street into Picadilly, as it was on the way to his own residence in Durham Square, where,

the Countess not being in town, he was living in comparative 'quiet. He hesitated a long time about it, but at last asked Avondale to go with him next Monday to see Auricoma. Walter scarcely liked doing so now that his sister was just come to London, but, being desirous to visit the modern Aspasia, and to discover, if possible, some means of rescuing his friend from the connection, he consented to accept the invitation, agreeing to meet him at the Houses of Parliament, and hear Mr. Maitland's explanation first.

CHAPTER VII.

MONDAY'S papers contained full accounts of the changes in the Cabinet. All the fresh arrangements had at length been completed at the Council held on Saturday. Considerable changes were introduced into the Treasury. The Minister of Finance was abolished, and in his stead were created a Chief Commissioner of Customs, Kelly, the late Minister of Finance, filling this post, and a Chief Commissioner of Inland Revenue, who was also to supervise " Woods and Forests," this office being given to Mr. Rowe.

Mr. Henry Blocke Head was to be Home Secretary. He was a man of fair abilities, but without the slightest energy or determination. His character was well shown in his first appointment. He had greatly contributed to the success of the Education Bill. He had comprehended fully and completely the faults in the then existing system, and had, in great part, drawn

out the new measure. Consequently it was natural that he should be selected to mould and build up the edifice he had called into being; but in this he utterly failed. He met with great opposition from the bulk of the masters of endowed schools, as well as from some members of Parliament, hostile to the scheme; he tried to please all parties, and, of course, pleased none; his administrative powers proved to be on a par with his resolution, or rather irresolution; though thoroughly versed in the details of the measure, he could not trace the faintest outline of the plan in which it was to be carried out; and, in the result, he resigned, leaving behind a chaos which taxed the utmost powers of his successor to get into order. He had recently exhibited in his speeches a leaning towards Radicalism, and had declared his unshaken confidence in the *ipse dixit* of the new Premier; and, doubtless, to these considerations he owed his elevation.

The Earl of Grantham may be thus summed up—a moderate Whig, who had been in the Upper House the last twelve years, and in the Lower House fifteen or sixteen years previously; some time since Under Secretary of the Home

Office, and, later, Vice-President of the Board of Trade, and the publisher of a volume of essays on Politics, said to have been written by his private secretary. His present appointment was a decided mistake. The administration of the Poor Law was the subject of very general complaint, and it required a statesman of firmness and prudence to improve it. For neither quality was the Earl of Grantham conspicuous above the average.

The other changes were, as we have said,—Mr. Jonathan Sloe, succeeding the Earl of Grantham; Algernon Lynworth, from the Irish Secretaryship to the Presidency of the Indian Board; Percy Mulgrave, from the Under Secretaryship of the Foreign Office to the vacancy thus made; and Mordaunt Tracy, to this latter vacancy.

The “Times” gave a qualified assent to the new arrangements. It was satisfied with the Ministry, as a whole. Two of the fresh men, Sloe and Rowe, would, doubtless, secure the support of their own especial adherents; but it was very questionable how long they would remain on friendly terms, and how long the

former, a hasty and unreflecting speaker, would be able to confine his tongue within the limits allowed a Minister. Sir Robert Kerr was but poorly replaced by Sir Charles Lynworth, and Mr. Mulgrave, as they had previously intimated, was hardly the person fitted for Ireland in its present condition. Mr. Head had previously been tried and found wanting; but Mr Tracy would, probably, be of real assistance and service.

The opinions of the other dailies may be summed up in unqualified laudation by the "Morning Mercury" and the "Pioneer," abuse, qualified by lamentation, by the "Constitutional."

In the evening Maitland made his statement to a crowded house. He set forth the changes in the Ministry, and the immediate objects to which their attention would be turned—but he added little information to that already known.

Wyversley, Avondale, and Jardine were among his hearers. The two former, making an excuse to Jardine, and agreeing to breakfast with him next morning before Avondale left for Waterbridge, betook themselves to Chelsea.

CHAPTER VIII.

WYVERSLEY had a carriage waiting, and a smart drive of twenty minutes brought them to "Lily-bank," Auricoma's villa. Avondale had heard much of it, and was well aware that his friend never allowed expense to interfere in the least with any of his fancies; but he was fairly surprised at the beauty of the spot. The lawn was large and well supplied with trees; it had two fountains rising out of some pretty rockwork, and the numerous flower-beds were one mass of bloom. The house was on the banks of the Thames, looking down a bend of it; consequently from the windows there was an uninterrupted view of fully a mile of the water. A considerable company seemed to have arrived, for besides two or three groups who were on the lawn, shouts of laughter kept resounding through the open casements into the cool night. A billiard-table stood in the hall.

“Nobody playing, for a wonder,” said Wyversley.

On the left hand was the drawing-room, on the right the dining-room. Into the former Wyversley went ; Auricoma came hastily to meet him.

“I am so glad you are come, Reginald ; I was almost afraid you had been detained.”

“Oh, no, not at all ; Maitland took some little to get over his explanation. You see I have brought Avondale ; that would be excuse enough if I had been an hour later.”

“I shan’t flatter you and offend Mr. Avondale by saying it would not ; but Mr. Avondale will allow me to say I am extremely delighted with the honour of his presence.”

“Rather permit me to say the pleasure is all on my side,” returned Avondale.

“Here, Walter,” said Wyversley, “I must introduce you to Mr. Latymer, and, I think, Lady Adela Beauchamp.”

The gentleman nodded ; he was an old bachelor, a well-known man upon town, though his fastness had never taken him to regions of rascality. He was past the middle age, and had been in

early years an *attaché* at Naples and Milan. He and some others were now engaged in a game of unlimited loo with the young lady of the aristocratic name, and two more with similar high-sounding titles.

“Here is the lion of the hour,” directing Avondale’s attention to a young man not much older than himself.

“Mr. Cadogan. He is taking it easy enough on that lounge, but you know how he and Captain Delancourt roughed it last autumn, between Montreal and Vancouver. They ate everything they could eat, save one of Herbert’s boots, which they had carefully preserved for a final repast, when they stumbled on some out-of-the-way settlement.”

“I am rejoiced,” exclaimed Avondale, “to make your acquaintance. The town has been ringing with your exploits since you returned at the beginning of spring. It must have been a wonderful journey.”

“Don’t compliment me,” laughed Cadogan; “you will make me blush. But seriously, there was nothing in it. Any two strong fellows might

do the same, and by showing a little more foresight and care, with far less discomfort."

"Discomfort, my dear fellow!" groaned Wyversley. "If the fellow boot was anything like that one you have at your rooms—"

"You have not seen it, Mr. Avondale," exclaimed Auricoma. "You must see it. He has brought it me once. It is quite a curiosity, but I don't think they could have eaten the other. It has a lot of great big nails in the sole, and there is a monstrous hole quite through the bottom, over which he has nailed a piece of wood; oh, it's a most amusing boot."

"It is a positive fact," said Cadogan; "I assure you, whatever that young lady may think, we did eat three boots, that is, of course, minus the nails, and we relished them remarkably. In fact, we held several debates as to the advisability of devouring the soles too, before giving up. Of course it was only the upper leather we turned into pabulum, the bottom we tied under our feet sandal fashion to keep them from the rough ground. The whole boot we wore turn and turn about."

“By Jove, it was a delightful trip,” said Wyversley.

“Why, Walter, it would almost have broken down your resolution.”

“Not unlikely, though it requires more courage to lie down and die than to struggle on.”

“Please don’t let us debate any longer about the great journey,” interrupted Auricoma. “It was very wonderful and all that—everybody says so—but it makes me quite uncomfortable to hear of persons being slowly starved,” and a little shudder shook her frame.

“However, Mr. Cadogan is quite recovered; he is lolling easily enough there. Pour him out another glass of wine, Mr. Avondale; perhaps you will take one yourself. That is old Madeira in the cut-class decanter, I would advise you to try it. The other is port, supposed to be ’47, but Mr. Latymer, who is always so polite, says it is not drinkable.”

“No, no, my dear madam, I merely said your wine merchant had put in a little, just a little, too much logwood when he manufactured this particular bin.”

“For shame, sir!”

“That is not improving matters with Auricoma,” laughed Wyversley, who had been investigating the article in question; “but I don’t think you are far wrong, Latymer.”

“I don’t, however, consider that Mr. Latymer should complain,” said Auricoma; “he has been tasting every kind I have in stock, from Tokay to Catalonia.”

“And if those bottles were full two hours ago,” added Wyversley, “he has been tasting them pretty often.”

“They were, I assure you,” replied Auricoma. “Mr. Latymer and the Marquis came to dinner with Adela and myself, and both were most disagreeable. They didn’t like the claret, St. Julien, too, and I tried them with white Burgundy, whereat that polite gentleman complained because it was not red, so I got them Chambertin, but it gave no more satisfaction. Then they grumbled at the cooking, till I was greatly tempted to send them both off. Afterwards you should have heard them abuse the dessert; it was too bad.”

“Latymer, Latymer! you ought to be ashamed of yourself!” arose from the hearers.

“Indeed, it was not I; it was Brayclift,” asseverated Latymer. “I did not say a word, save to ask Miss Erle if I might summarily eject Brayclift.”

“But you did, sir; it was too bad of you. So finally to appease them, I had up a decanter of that old blue Madeira, Reginald, and you can see how much of it is left; besides, they finished the St. Julien, and both bottles of Burgundy ‘to save its being wasted, they said,’ and there’s an empty port bottle or two on the table.”

“Well, Latymer,” ejaculated Avondale, taking up some half-a-dozen bottles one after the other, “you must be a thirsty fish. Leoville, Leoville, empty both; sherry decanter ditto, and another on the same road; this, Miss Erle, port? empty, too, by Jove, and not half-a-pint in the next. You have been giving them champagne as well. Why, this must be a quart bottle, and only the smell left; and, my gracious, they have flavoured the mixture with Deidesheim.”

Avondale looked horrified at Latymer, and the others laughed.

“You must not be too hard on him,” said

Auricoma, coming to his assistance. "He is not to be credited with every one of those bottles ; that is, not the whole, only a little of each. Mr. Cadogan likes champagne."

"Yes, I do," said Cadogan, "but, unfortunately, so do Adela and Brayclift. They favoured me with one little glass out of that small flask, and when a few seconds later I applied for another remittance, the answer was 'no effects.'"

"Hard lines that," said Avondale.

"But it is not the full account," objected Adela. "He kept the hock to himself and Stanley Carlton, and would not let Aubrey (Brayclift) or myself have any, so we seized on the champagne when it made its appearance, and drank it up ; and you should have seen how dreadfully disappointed they were to find it all gone. Was not that the fact, Mr. Latymer?"

"Oh, yes ; appeal to Latymer, of course," replied Cadogan ; "he would at your bidding tell any cram. And how could he know ? He was busily engaged the whole of the time in discovering the bottom, first of that fretted sherry decanter, and then of the Madeira one. He could not even offer Miss Erle a glass."

“Shame, Latymer, shame!” expostulated Wyversley.

“But Mr. Cadogan was quite as remiss,” said Auricoma; “I had to ask him twice before he would allow me a sip of the Epernay.”

“A polite company you have been favoured with this evening,” said Wyversley, laughing.

“Yes. I have put a bad mark against Mr. Cadogan’s name, and two against Mr. Latymer’s, and shall not let him come to my box again for some time.”

“Serve him right, too,” added Adela Beauchamp. “He went with the Marquis and myself to the ‘Savoy’ last Saturday, and he was too lazy even to clap Lucy Vivian after she sang ‘Fading away.’”

“But I could not say pretty things to you and applaud her at the same time,” objected Latymer.

“Pooh, pooh! Don’t try to gammon one with any such nonsense as that,” replied Adela.

“Let us leave him, Mr. Avondale,” said Auricoma. “You promised some time ago to have a game of billiards with me.”

“With the greatest pleasure, though you have

such a reputation that the game will be altogether one-sided."

"One-sided your way, you mean; don't assume such a low opinion of yourself—I always suspect it."

"I will come too," said Adela Beauchamp; "that is, if you do not intend to play single."

"Oh, no, it will be better with partners," said Wyversley. "But you surely won't desert your gallant cavalier?"

"Won't I, though? He has been quite dull this evening—drinking too much wine, I suppose. I tried to get him out on the lawn just now, it is so fine, but he would stay in. So we have been muddling over those cards till I was dropping off to sleep as you entered."

"Heyday, Latymer, another charge. This is a pretty accusation to be laid against a man like you."

"'Pon my word, it is downright slander. I—"

"There, don't listen to him," interrupted Adela. "Come on, Mr. Avondale, the others will follow," and she incontinently passed her arm through his, and, with a merry twinkle in her blue eyes, led him off.

At the door they encountered young Talbot and Stansville.

“You here, Avondale!” exclaimed the latter. “Have you dropped from the clouds? Why, you are supposed to be at Waterbridge, running full tilt of one of her Majesty’s Ministers. You are in bad hands, allow me to tell you. The lady on your arm is a most determined heart-breaker.”

“Pooh, pooh, Mr. Stansville—yours, at least, I should never break. You may make yourself useful by handing me a cue.”

“Oh, you are going to have out that game of billiards you arranged on the Derby Day, I suppose?”

“Yes, Stansville,” answered Wyversley. “It is Auricoma and myself against Walter and Lady Adela—which will win?”

“We shall, of course,” said Adela vivaciously, before Stansville could reply. “I can beat you any day, and I am sure such a genius as Mr. Avondale can do the same for Violet.”

The game proceeded, one hundred up, Wyversley leading, and giving the usual miss. The balls would not run well for Avondale, and, con-

sequently, the other side kept ahead, scoring forty to his eighteen, when his partner made a break of twelve. Once more they ran away, and reached ninety-two, when he and his partner were at seventy. Then Adela not only put on ten in fine style, amid the applause of the lookers on, who nearly filled the room, but left the balls badly for Wyversley. His lordship could do nothing, and Avondale, getting his hand well in, finished the game.

“Well won, Walter,” exclaimed Wyversley.

“Not a bit of it,” objected Avondale. “The credit is entirely due to Adela.”

“Yes, she played really well—we will drink her health;” and “Lady Adela Beauchamp” went round the giddy circle.

“I am no match for her,” he continued; “so you must, to settle the question, have just one game with Auricoma.”

“Decidedly not—far be it from me to cross swords with so fair a dame. I willingly yield myself vanquished.”

“No, you will not, sir. You must fight, and do your worst. If you don’t, I shall proclaim

you—what is the term, Reg?—recreant, I think, and that will be a deeper stigma than Adela fixed on Mr. Latymer just now.”

“ Well, if I must, I must.”

“ Remember,” she added with a pretty laugh, “ it is to be a fight to the death. We neither give nor ask quarter. Reginald will be my squire—” “ And I,” “ And I,” “ And I,” put in several voices.

“ How bloodthirsty you are become,” said Wyversley; “ and see what a number you have on your side. You will frighten Walter—he has no one to back him up.”

“ Don’t alarm yourself,” said Adela, “ I am not going to desert him. I don’t imagine he will stand in need of much assistance. He knows that ‘ faint heart never won fair lady.’ Do you feel particularly nervous, Walter?” and she smiled a siren’s smile, and gave a witching shrug with her fair shoulders. “ Better take a glass of wine first, perhaps, and let me chalk your cue. Now, ladies and gentlemen, the course is cleared for the grand tournament between—never mind who—play.”

It was again one hundred up. Avondale led ; the luck was pretty even, and they kept fairly together, sometimes the one, sometimes the other, running on eight or ten ahead by a good break. Like most women, Auricoma was much better at pocketing than cannoning ; she had also acquired the difficult knack of leaving the balls badly, and was, therefore, altogether no mean adversary. When Avondale had reached ninety-five her score was ten less. Eight she wiped off, and thus the game seemed her opponent's, but he missed at ninety-nine an easy cannon. His gallantry aroused a cheer, under cover of which Auricoma acknowledged her defeat, and craved considerate treatment at his hands.

Avondale, however, would not take credit for the victory—"another game would end differently."

"Oh, no ; I would not venture again. I am satisfied. Come on out into the fresh air ; the room is rather warm."

Avondale had scarcely looked round before. He was now surprised to see how many were present — fashionable young fellows, though

with one or two approaching middle age, most of whom he knew, and girls intended by nature for a better fate.

It was a beautiful night. The summer breeze was hushed to a gentle whisper, and scarcely stirred the leaves of the trees, or rippled the surface of the noble river that runs close by. The moon, near its full, shed its silvery beams like a flood of light on the fountains and the flowers, and on the expanse of water before the house. Passing lovely was the prospect, and one could have deemed it a scene from fairy-land rather than in the suburbs of the modern Babylon. Love was in the air, and all yielded to its spell, all save, perhaps, Avondale. He felt the fascination of the time and place, his spirit yielded insensibly to the enthralling allurements that surrounded him, but, potent as were the fascination and the allurements, not utterly did they steep him in forgetfulness or transform the deep-seated springs of his character. The subdued laughter that ever and anon arose, would grate harshly on his ears, and the murmuring prattle of female voices, soft and low as it was, had a discordant ring. Some similar feelings

probably possessed Auricoma, for, as they slowly paced the lawn, he noticed an unwonted quivering in her voice, and a brightness in her eyes that seemed to arise from tears.

“What a row those fellows are making in the dining-room!” ejaculated Wyversley, as a louder peal than usual came forth. “Who is it you have there?”

“I scarcely know. Brayclift is one, and I think Claude Horton is another. They are playing cards.”

“Of course, and for no light stakes. Brayclift is going to the devil fast. He has lost frightfully on the turf this year. But, hang it, Auricoma, there is that fellow Dawson here again. I saw him in the hall. I wish you would make him understand he is not wanted.”

“I should be glad if he would stay away—you know it, Reginald; but how am I to make him? He came to-night with Adela and the Marquis.”

“I dare say. He sticks to Brayclift, no doubt; so birds of prey are certain to be found where the carcase is; but if he can’t take a broad hint he should have distinct information that his

company is not wanted. I hope I don't offend you, Walter, in thus speaking my mind."

"I am sorry that you don't. I fear that Dawson's deeds and connections are not such as will, in all respects, bear inspection."

"I know they are not," said Auricoma; "but I hope neither of you will quarrel with him. He would not hesitate at anything to get revenged."

"What time do you have supper, Violet?" asked Wyversley.

"I told them twelve o'clock; is that too early?"

"Too late, I think; because that would mean half-past, and you know how long we are certain to be over it. Walter has to be off to-morrow morning to his election again."

"Then we will say half-past eleven, if you like. It is getting on for that already."

She went into the house to give the necessary orders, and, when she rejoined them, said—

"I have asked Lucy Vivan—she is just come—to sing 'Fading Away.'"

As she spoke a piano sounded in the drawing-room, and a finely modulated voice rolled forth the words of that fashionable song—

“Fading away into stillness deep,
The distant echoes die,
Like the first winds that fitfully sweep
Across an autumn sky.

“Like the first winds, that in saddest tone,
Tell that the aching heart,
Its gladsome spring and gay summer gone,
From love and hope must part.”

All remained in mute admiration till the song was over, and then with applause amply repaid the singer. She was the favourite actress at the Savoy, and this song occurred in “The Lost Lord of Craven Hall,” which had been recently brought out, and in which she represented the heroine. She was a good actress, and always got up her part well and carefully, and this, added to her graceful figure and excellent voice, rendered her one of the leading stars. The applause sank into a silence which was only broken by Latymer asking “some one to favour them with a more lively and less sentimental melody to counteract the effect of such a depressing recital.”

Adela Beauchamp volunteered.

“I will give you the song you so much like, Mr. Latymer—‘When I was young.’”

“That is too bad of you,” he objected. “I

don't care a bit for that miserable ditty ; and, besides, it is so common."

"It will do capitally, Adela," exclaimed Bray-clift, who was not on such good terms with Latymer as he was with the young lady. "Go on—we all want it."

So, without any more prelude, she started off—

"When I was young I loved each lass
That had a beaming eye ;
But perhaps I better loved a glass
Of sparkling *eau de vie*.

"My gushing heart kept changing hands,
It ne'er was really mine ;
'Twas Polly's first, and next 'twas Anne's,
And then 'twas lost in wine."

One or two more songs, and a little more tender conversation and flirtation under the lilacs and amongst the laurels, and supper was announced. Avondale was as much surprised at the appearance of the dining-room as he had been at that of the drawing-room. A chastened and cultivated taste was in each displayed, both in the selections and in the grouping of the furniture. Even Wharfedale House, the most *recherché* establishment in London, could not disdain a comparison. This woman, where

could she have learnt such discrimination? He gazed at her in pity and sorrow. He felt much disposed to curse the dispensations of that Providence which had made her what she was. He now understood the sway she exercised over his friend, the sway which a strong mind ever has over a weaker one, the sway which, powerful as it is in case of man over man, is rendered tenfold more powerful when exercised by a woman beautiful but resolute, ambitious but loving, over the soul of him that adores her. And, if he pitied Auricoma, he felt concern for Wyversley. He could no longer conceal from himself that the young nobleman loved her in the fullest and truest sense of the word, and it was very doubtful whether considerations for the opinions of society would prevent a marriage.

Auricoma took the head of the table. The seat, somewhat elevated above the rest, suited her queenly bearing admirably. Right and left of her were the two friends, and opposite, at the end of the table, the Marquis of Brayclift, supported by two damsels, on his right, Adela Beauchamp, an especial favourite of his, on the left,

Mrs. St. John Broosby. Twenty-one sat down. The females were all of them the better members of their class; indeed, save the two just mentioned, none were decidedly doubtful characters, the greater part being actresses. Lucy Vivian was at Wyversley's right hand and under the particular care of Stansville. The tables were loaded with every delicacy. Noticing Avondale's look of wonderment, Auricoma told him not to deem that this was a specimen of her usual style of living, it was only to honour the visit of a friend of her dearest friend.

The fun grew fast, youthful sallies and sharp repartee succeeded in quick succession, and enjoyment reigned supreme. Auricoma proved herself well fitted for the position of hostess, and, spite of a predisposition to the contrary and a determination to judge her by the strictest measure, Avondale could not but admit to himself that she would fill with equal *éclat* the rank of an English peeress—if it were not for the one damning and insurmountable obstacle.

The more material part of the meal was over, when Lucy Vivian passed over to him a scrap of paper:—

“Before we break up, you must propose Auricoma’s health.”

He had expected as much, but it was an office which he hesitated to accept, as he could not preach a homily; every word that he might say would go to strengthening the coils enwrapping his friend. Yet he did not like to refuse; it would be a piece of gross unpoliteness, and, besides, Auricoma had evidently, during the evening, been nervously anxious to secure his favourable opinion. He took a middle course. While the conversation was still in full swing, he scribbled on a leaf of his pocket-book a few lines in rhyme, and sent them to Claude Horton, who possessed a good voice, and confidence enough even, if he had not to sing any difficult air at first sight, with a request that he would trolly them as best he could for the general benefit. Horton shook his head, and hesitated at first, but after showing them to Adela Beauchamp, who was next him, he attempted the task, that lively young lady having kindly offered to relieve him of the undertaking if he were afraid. He got up, and promised briefly that he was not going to make a speech, though he was about to adventure on a performance

which would probably seem to some quite as unsatisfactory—a song. He begged them, however, to restrain their condemnation till they had heard the words, which would certainly be ample apology for his presumption ; and he hoped, if he broke down, they would help him through with it. A clatter of glasses and an irregular cheer followed, and then amidst a silence which could not have arisen from curiosity alone he began—

THE QUEEN OF THE FEAST.

Auricoma, the beautiful !
With hair of golden hue,
Whose lovely eyes are gleaming bright
As drops of summer dew !
See here from every quarter drawn,
Thy potent sway to own,
Youth, wealth, and rank, a brilliant band,
Are thronging round thy throne.

The silence was broken by uproarious applause, as he concluded, and he had to repeat the verses, Adela and Brayclift assisting him this time. The company would have demanded it a third time but for their anxiety to hear the next verse.

Auricoma, our more than queen,
The banquet's crowning light,
Didst thou not grace the festive board,
'Twere hung with shades of night.
One favour now, our cups stand full—
Do not the prayer disdain—
A toast, a toast ! we'll pledge it thee
Again and yet again.

At the conclusion, the hearers seemed to have suddenly become demented. The cheering, for some time, literally shook the room, and it subsided only to be renewed three successive times as the verse was sung over. Then "A toast! a toast!" was shouted on every side. But Latymer rising, obtained silence.

"Gentlemen, we are utterly forgetting all our chivalry and politeness. 'When I was young,' (hear, hear, and loud laughter) — 'when I was young' it was most decidedly the custom to drink the health of the lady of the house (hear, hear; 'Well said, Latymer') before we did that of anyone else. But I am old, and things have changed, though I cannot help thinking it a gross slight to our fair hostess to ask her for a toast before we have ourselves pledged her (deafening applause). Gentlemen, fill up the ladies' glasses too; bumpers and no heel-taps. 'Auricoma, the Queen of the Feast, and long life to her.'"

Every one rose, and around the table resounded "Auricoma!" "Auricoma is the Banquet's Light!" "Auricoma the Beautiful!" "the Golden-Haired!"

Auricoma tried to repress her emotions, but

the tears could not be entirely restrained, and she replied in a voice very thick and broken, that roused unwonted feeling in the hearts of more than one unthinking youth present, and caused several of the more impressible girls to give vent to their feelings in hysterical sobs and laughter.

“Gentlemen, I cannot command myself to thank you or even to find the necessary words. Believe me, I am most deeply obliged for the way you have drunk my health. I cannot say more, but I give you the toast you wish, coupling with it the name of this gentleman, Mr Walter Avondale, who has paid me such a compliment—‘The Reward that crowns Success,’ and from my inmost heart, I trust you will each win it.”

The short speech was received with even greater applause than Latymer’s. It affected Avondale more than he cared to evince, and gave him a further insight into the speaker’s character. He looked at Wyversley, and was not surprised to observe his eyes glistening and his cheek flushed with love and feeling. The toast was honoured to the full, and, after his reply, others

quickly followed. The time flew by unheeded, and it was much past one o'clock when Avondale looked at his watch. Wyversley noticed the action, and proceeded, without hesitation, to break up the carouse, saying that, grieved as he was to disturb them, yet it was impossible that Avondale or himself could remain longer. A half lament came to the lips of the company as they left their seats, but it was dispersed by the complaint from Adela Beauchamp—

“What not a single dance before we part? Let us go out on the lawn and tread one merry measure.”

She gave her hand to Brayclift, Wyverley took Auricoma, Avondale Lucy Vivian, and the others were soon suited. The windows of the drawing-room opened to the ground, so that the music could be fully heard. Stansville, a good player, seated himself at the piano, as there were more men than women. A galop first, a set of quadrilles next to recover breath, then the maddening waltz, and as a finale, the galop “Back from Richmond.”

The evening was over. The carriages of those who had driven soon came round. Wyversley

went into the house to find his hat, leaving Avondale and Auricoma standing by his horse, which the latter was patting, as she was very fond of it. He was gone a minute or two. Auricoma said—

“I had better go and assist Wyversley; he won’t know where to search.” She hesitated, and then held out her hand—“Good night, Mr. Avondale”—wring his nervously, even painfully, and speaking in accents that went home to his heart, “You will not, cannot think so very bad of me,” hastily ran off.

“Latymer has promised to see the fellows off, said Wyversley, as he got into the phaeton. “Minnie Roberts is going to sing them one last song. We will wait for the beginning. Hark! there it is; she has a clear utterance.”

“Oh ’tis sweet to think that where’er we rove
We are sure to find something blissful and dear,
That when we are far from the lips that we love
We have but to make love to the lips that are near.”

“There is philosophy for you, Walter; but is not Auricoma a glorious girl? You are almost in love with her yourself.”

CHAPTER IX.

AVONDALE'S train left soon after breakfast. Wyversley and Stuart Jardine saw him off, the former desiring him to write if he had any spare time, to say how his prospects looked, the latter promising to come down the next evening, if a cricket match in which he was engaged—a far more important event to him than any election—was over in time.

Arrived at Waterbridge, he immediately sought the offices of Rosse and Taylor. The former was in. He had much to tell Avondale. His committee had grown stronger, they had held several meetings, many persons had promised their votes, and, what was really more important than all, both Irving and Radford had determined to petition in case of non-success.

The evening before, a large meeting of the lower classes had been held at the Market Hall—the market committee had no business to per-

mit the use of it for such a purpose. Several demagogues spoke, all inveighing loudly against the upper classes, and especially against Avondale's supporters. One of them, a delegate from some trades-union, particularly pitched into Radford, saying that he who had been once a working man was now leagued with their oppressors, that he owed his wealth entirely to the labour of those he was tyrannising over, that such men as he were traitors to their town and country, and much more in the same style. A few cried shame, but most applauded—the mob always applaud abuse and coarseness—and he next favoured Irving very similarly, but making the distinction that Irving not having ever done a day's work, and, consequently, not deserving a penny of what he possessed, had, nevertheless, some excuse for his harshness in that he was unable to appreciate a labourer's feelings; while Radford having, on the contrary, experienced the bitterness of daily toil, clearly showed by his severity to those under him that he had not the common feelings of humanity. Starrett, in acknowledging the inevitable vote of confidence, palliated the expressions employed by this fellow

and others like him—for he was not alone—and even defended some of the assertions he had made.

“In consequence, Ralford and Irving called on me this morning, and said I might proclaim it as widely as I chose that ‘they were resolved, in case any open bribery should occur, to file a petition against the election.’”

Avondale was glad to hear of their determination, but trusted that his return would render it needless.

“You will be returned, I am confident,” said Rosse, “if no corruption is practised; but that I cannot hope for. Mr. Mulgrave will doubtless, if possible, avoid it, but he is in the wrong hands. Skinner and Grabmuny are old practitioners at this work, and won’t let him be honest if he would. They are well named. In common business the former looks after the clients, the latter after the fees. In elections Skinner acts as cashier to the candidate, whose cash soon disappears at a rapid rate; Grabmuny turns paymaster to the mob, and you may be certain he does not distribute to them a penny more than is absolutely necessary to purchase their consciences.

Mulgrave has had it rather warm the last day or two. His meetings have been all somewhat boisterous; the roughs don't take kindly to him, and, for some reason or other, they have got into the habit of asking after his wife—"Does she know he is out?" "Has she given him permission to put up?" "What is his allowance for expenses?" and so on."

"Decidedly unpleasant, and the more so as he can fully appreciate the force of the enquiries."

"Rather. Some of his committee have been playing tricks with him. His stiff bearing, I suppose, amuses them. They took him round the back slums yesterday morning—you know that the laziest workmen always keep Saint Monday—under pretence, no doubt, of seizing the opportunity to catch these fellows at home. My office boy followed the procession, and his narrative of the proceedings has kept the clerks laughing all the day. Mr. Taylor happened to stumble across them in the midst of a bevy of bare-armed, unbonneted, slatternly fishwomen. It was in River Street, better known as the 'Scent-Box,' where the effluvia arising, even in coldest weather, from the garbage is horrible—

imagine what it is now. I wonder Taylor, who was going to the Quay, did not prefer to go round by the Row. He said the expression of Mulgrave's face was a perfect study—a union of disgust, contempt, and anger, set off by a ghastly smile. He had, apparently, been expressing his solicitude for the welfare of the different families, and, as Taylor passed, he capped his affability by kissing, amidst the approving exclamations of the female bystanders, a dirty little urchin, said urchin's nose and face having first been elaborately polished with the still dirtier apron of its mother."

"Poor Mulgrave! Nothing but dread of Lady Thanet could have carried him safely through such an ordeal. I hope they will take him to Mrs. Snooks and her daughters."

"Ah, you made the acquaintance of that charming household—hope you enjoyed it. By the by, Mulgrave holds forth in the British Schoolroom this evening. He is rather strong on religious matters, but as his hearers are, so I am told, to comprise the ministers of all persuasions, from Father O'Slybootes down to Tom Jackson, the Unitarian, I scarcely see how he will satisfy

every one. I should not be surprised if the reverend gentlemen first, one and all, pitched into him, and then squared accounts by a set-to amongst themselves. Well, about our own matters. I have opened an account in your name with the 'National Provincial'—they have a branch here, and it is better to avoid any such suspicion as might result from dealing with either of the local banks. You will therefore not spend one farthing personally, save, of course, in your hotel expenses. If you have any need to make a disbursement, send the individual to us with a note. One of the town newspapers, the 'Star,' is Radical; we can't have anything to do with it. The other, the 'Gazette,' is Liberal, but it has taken up Mulgrave rather warmly, and poured cold water on you. Consequently, I have advertised pretty heavily in the county paper, that is published at Stanton, and circulates largely here, and it has, of course, in return, been maintaining your cause most energetically. Public-houses we have left entirely alone; their support is not worth the money it costs. We have arranged for you to address the in-voters on Thursday, Friday, and Monday, and the outlying ones on Saturday, at

Ashton; and Tuesday, if need be, at Mayford, but, as the nomination is to be next day, very probably there will be quite enough to look after in other ways. I don't think there is much else to say. You must come with me to dinner. I expect Irving, and Captain Wright, and one or two others—they will certainly come in the course of the evening, if not to dinner—and we can talk over future proceedings.”

On the way to Mr. Rosse's they passed numerous supporters. Captain Wright was one.

“You must excuse me, Rosse. I have just promised young Radford to dine with him. He came down from town on Saturday, Mr. Avondale, to join in the fun, and he has been working very hard for you. Two or three other fellows will be there, Charlie Benton, and Mr. Irving's nephew, and so on, and we are all going in a body to Mulgrave's meeting. We shan't make any noise, not a bit; we hope to have much better fun by setting the parsons at loggerheads, and getting them to excommunicate each other, and the worthy candidate as well. It would be fine if we could see O'Slybootes laying into Jackson, or if we could arrange just one little round

between ranting Sam Fuddle and the aristocratic de Hautville. Good day—I am all hot for the sport, and shall be so disappointed if we don't meet with any. Good day, Mr. Avondale—we'll look you up before midnight, and report results."

Avondale got back to the "Royal George" about eleven, and, almost immediately after, Captain Wright and the other conspirators came rushing in. They had enjoyed themselves fully, at Mulgrave's expense; and, as soon as the introductions were over, hastened to describe the meeting. Wright was the speaker—

"You really should have been there, sir, I would not have missed the occasion for a fortune. Thomson, the big brewer, was in the chair. He is great at any kind of religious meeting, Church of England, that is—he is a stickler to the Establishment. He owns half the public-houses in the place, and, consequently, subscribes to all the societies, Missionary, Band of Hope, Pastoral Aid—"

"Never mind naming 'em, Wright. Mr. Avondale will know quite well—besides, you are lumping them rather—all, save Temperance and Bands of Hope; those, and Dissenters generally, he hates like poison."

“Well, as soon as he rose to start the talk, one of Mr. Radford’s workmen, who was in the plot, rose too, and, with a most devout air and puritanical twang, considered ‘it would not be becoming to open a meeting to discuss religious topics without first asking a blessing,’ and thereupon proposed that ‘the Rev. Mr. Samuel Jehoshaphat Fuddle be desired to offer up a short prayer.’ Now, if there is any man in the whole world Thomson dislikes, it is Fuddle. He is a—a—ranter, I forget the scientific designation of the animal, and therefore he is ever inveighing against the sins and idolatry of the Church. He is a red Republican and Socialist, while Thomson is a cut-and-dry Whig of the old style. He is a teetotaller, and, as such, cannot speak too harshly of the demon of drink; and is convinced that though an Episcopalian may get to heaven, and, perhaps, too, even a Tory, by very special arrangement, yet a brewer is condemned, beyond all hope of remission, to the hottest corner in Hades. You can judge then how aghast the chairman looked. Sammy got on his feet, and ‘perfectly agreed with the proposition; perhaps, too, the result might be the rescue of some Godless souls

—there were many present—from perdition ; and it might have a saving effect on Mr. Muggins, the young gentleman’—”

“Stop ; that’s too good,” shouted Avondale. “Mulgrave transformed into Muggins, the man of *ton* into a youthful class leader. Mulgrave won’t hear the last of it for some time. Go on, sir ; I beg your pardon.”

“ ‘Young gentleman’ made Mulgrave shift in his seat, and ‘Godless souls present’ startled the other divines. There was a general hubbub ; but at last Mulgrave himself appeased it. Fuddle, saddened at the defeat of his good intentions, ‘wiped off the dust of his feet against the assembly,’ and would have departed if some fellow had not begged him, as he was going out, not to leave them entirely to their own wicked devices.

“The Chairman brought his introductory remarks to a very sudden termination, and the hero of the evening commenced. We cheered him well, for he looked dreadfully in want of it. He got along very badly ; partly, perhaps, because he was on debatable ground ; but, after all excuse made, it was a miserable attempt at a speech

He was dreadfully afraid of purely Bible topics, the nominal subject of his discourse, and kept on as long as he could upon general morality. It was most essential that children's characters should be properly moulded at an early age, and so on. They could not be too thoroughly impressed with the necessity of strictly observing the common maxims of morality, 'to do your duty to all,' 'to get your own living honestly,' 'not to steal or to covet your neighbour's goods.' Here some stentorian voice added, 'Nor to commit adultery with his widder,' and most indecorous shouts of laughter followed, which were reiterated when another of the *canaille* objected, 'With his wife you mean, Jim,' and Jim maintained, 'No, I don't—with his widder, like the gamekeeper run off with Tom Cook's widder afore Tom were really cooked, and Tom gettin' well again fout the gamekeeper on Rodmead moor, and drashed 'un well.' I really pitied Mulgrave. His equanimity was thoroughly upset, and his sentences grew more lagging. At last he ventured to say the Bible should be read in all schools, and then, as the priest looked terribly irate, he added—save where conscientious scruples existed against it,—

which exception caused all the other preachers to assume lowering countenances. He continued that one uniform system of doctrine should be associated with the Word of God, whereat the Church parsons smoothed their rugged brows, while their brethren frowned the more savagely—with such modifications as might be found necessary—a qualification that did not satisfy any party.

“ ‘You would, so I understand, compel the reading of the Scriptures as part of the daily instruction?’ asked the Vicar of St. Anne’s.

“ ‘Yes, decidedly.’

“ ‘You would, would you, in Catholic schools?’ put in O’Slybootes.

“ ‘Oh no, not if the priesthood made objections.’

“ ‘But you deem Scriptural teaching essential in a Christian country?’ enquired the Vicar.

“ ‘Absolutely essential, sir, if we do our duty.’

“ ‘And is it essential if Holy Church considers the lives of the saints better fitted for young minds?’

“ ‘That alters the matter. Decidedly not in such a case.’

“ Here some one shouted, ‘ Well done, governor ; blow hot, blow cold with same breath.’

“ ‘ And about doctrine, you would allow Dissenters to impart their own views to the children in their schools?’ suggested the Methodist minister.

“ ‘ Yes, I could not think of interfering with any man’s peculiar principles.’

“ ‘ But you would prohibit the worship of saints, and pictures, and images?’

“ ‘ Of course. I utterly abhor everything savouring of idolatry.’

“ ‘ And you would put down Papistical practices in the Church?’ added the Vicar.

“ ‘ Undoubtedly. Puseyism is worse than Roman—no, than Unitar—no, I mean than—ah—yes—pure and undefiled religion is what we should all seek after.’

“ ‘ You, however, think crucifixes and paintings of the Virgin most important to illustrate the truth?’ enquired the priest.

“ ‘ And you would support Ritualism as admirably admitted for attracting some persons?’

“ ‘ Yes. I have no hesitation on those points. The national form of worship must be maintained

in all its simplicity and purity ; but I would not interfere with means adopted to secure the attention of the heedless or inattentive. And while I denounce every action savouring of idolatry, I believe material symbols and tangible forms may often be most happily employed to inculcate important dogmas.' ”

“A most interesting spectacle. Why, Mulgrave was intended by nature for a tenth-rate attorney, or for some such occupation where capacity to change sides is all-important to ensure success. You must be rather dry with all this talking ; take another glass. What did you have before—claret ? This is good, better than one expects at a country inn. Mr. Benton has some hock at his elbow, and there is sherry in that bottle, but I would advise you not to touch it,” said Avondale.

“Yes, the claret is very fair, thanks, but Brown is noted for his wine. Of course all the while a fire of small shot was going on round the room ; and the ministers, at each reply, glanced at each other in a way that portended a desperate hand-to-hand fight shortly. I can't tell you half of what was said. At last it came to a crisis.

“ ‘ You require the catechism to be explained to the children and got up by them ? ’ asked the Vicar.

“ ‘ Yes, most certainly.’

“ ‘ And portions of the missal to be a daily lesson ? ’ continued the father.

“ ‘ Yes, a very necessary part of their instruction.’

“ Here parson and priest turned their attention to each other, the former shaking his hat in the latter’s face, and the latter gripping his walking-stick as though at Donnybrook.

“ ‘ You would direct the clergy to inculcate into the young the doctrines of original sin and consubstantiation,’ demanded de Hautville.”

“ ‘ Of course, most undeniable truths.’

“ ‘ And you think that boys and girls should be taught that the Pope is as bad as the devil, and High Church scamps a great deal worse ? ’ said Samuel Fuddle.”

“ ‘ I have not a doubt of it,’ and thereupon the curate and the ranter faced each other with manifest intention to settle their differences on the spot.

“ ‘ Dr. Watts’s psalms and hymns should

alone be sung in God's house?' asked the Methodist.'

"'Unquestionably; they are gems of poetry.'

"'And no singing or music should be permitted in places of worship?' said the Quaker.

"'Certainly not, the attention is distracted by such noises.'

"'With this the disciple of Wesley and the man of peace flourished their gingham over each other's head as though to resolve *vi et armis* the points of dispute. Clatter, clatter went their tongues; but rising above the din one thankless wretch followed up the last answer with, 'And Tom Paine's catechism should be made the primer in every infant school?'

"'I think so. It is a most invaluable work.'

"'Oh dear, the confusion became ten times confounded. Episcopalian and Baptist, Quaker and Romanist, all requested an explanation of this closing reply, and then again, ere explanation could be given, continued the hot debate *inter se*. At length the irate divines withdrew, though their wrangling continued till they were fully a quarter of a mile off, and it is rumoured that on the bridge one couple, de Hautville

and Fuddle, terminated their arguments by means of nature's primitive weapons, his reverence acting as second to the one and Fox's follower performing that office for the other. As soon as they had gone, the usual vote in favour of Mulgrave was made and seconded, but Benton here moved an amendment, which Radford seconded, that 'as the right honourable gentleman has shown such an intimate acquaintance with Educational subjects he be recommended to resign his present post, and obtain an appointment as Inspector of Schools.' Uproarious cheering followed this proposition, and as the chairman would not receive it, we put it ourselves to the assembly, and, at least three-fourths of the hands were held up for it. Not a word could afterwards be heard. Old Thomson shouted something to the reporters, probably the original motion. Mulgrave bowed his thanks—for what no one can imagine. The good point about him is that he holds on to his work with all the stubbornness of a genuine bulldog; but that is very little to make a Minister out of. If he is to be taken as a specimen of our acutest politicians, if he is to be ranked among

the great statesmen of the day, then it is no wonder that we are losing caste and prestige amongst foreigners, that our operations are meddle in one quarter and muddle in another, that English diplomacy has become a synonym for stupidity, mismanagement, and irresolution. That is nearly all. Mulgrave and his party having beaten a retreat we were left in possession of the field, and we then propounded a resolution in favour of you, and it was carried unanimously, though I frankly confess that if it had been in favour of the King of Dahomey, or Brown the corporation beadle, it would have been received with just the same approbation. So we came away, having first seen the place cleared and handed over to the charge of the schoolmaster in order to prevent any reports being spread as to damage done, &c."

"You must have had a most amusing scene. I should much like to have been present, but it would not have been safe for me to have put in an appearance."

"No, it would not; Mulgrave's friends would have sworn you cheered us on. You would have enjoyed it. Mulgrave grew perfectly distracted with the different questions put to him; their effect increased by a running comment kept up by the

gamins, and when he made that hash about Paine I don't think he was in full possession of his senses. He won't venture again to expound his ideas on religious matters to a mixed multitude. And the ministers themselves—the charitable looks they cast at each other—there was no need for us to incite them or to work upon their prejudices. They were too well primed with intolerance, and required but the slightest spark to cause them to explode. But it is useless for me to pretend to describe the climax. You may imagine it, perhaps. Mulgrave on the platform, his examiners, some there, some in the front seats, waxing every moment hotter and more irate with him and themselves, and the mob cheering them on most vociferously. I suppose Mulgrave's committee scarcely expected such a crowded attendance. You had nothing to do with filling the room, I suppose, Radford ?”

“I? Nothing at all. How could I? I rather fancy I saw a number of the governor's workmen present; but I could not be certain, I am at home so little. That stout foreman of yours was there, I believe, Irving.”

“Was he? Not unlikely. He is fond of a

joke, almost too much so, my uncle tells him sometimes, and I should not be surprised if he brought some of his chums with him."

"Well, gentlemen," said Wright, after a little more conversation, "I don't think we need detain Mr. Avondale any longer. It is getting late, and he will have quite enough work to do before next Wednesday without losing his sleep in listening to our chatter. We will just drink his health, and success and confusion to Mulgave, Starrett, and Everett—a bumper."

"And long life to the Rev. Mr. Fuddle," suggested Avondale.

"And long life to Sammy Fuddle—now one and all, Mr. Avondale!"

"Mr. Avondale, M.P. for Waterbridge!"

"Mr. Avondale!"

"Mr. Avondale!"

Avondale thanked them very much, protested there was no need for them to go, and begged of those who were disengaged to take breakfast with him next morning. He had not yet settled about the morrow's visits, and should, therefore, be glad for some one to accompany him. Benton, Radford, and one or two others accepted the invita-

tion ; Irving and Wright could not ; and they then went off, highly pleased with the evening's amusement, and waking the silence of the night with the ballad—

The Tory, he came to Waterbridge town,
To get him a seat, to get him a seat ;
But the voters they'd have the money paid down,
For they thought him a cheat, they thought him a cheat.

'Twas a £20 note to the councilmen first ;
The whole of 'em took it, the whole of 'em took it.
In dealings like these they never went trust,
Though he wanted to book it, he wanted to book it.

The grocer got five, and the draper asked ten,
As he was a swell, as he was a swell.
The baker and butcher, like sensible men,
Kept their little game well, their little game well.

The freemen were dear at 10s. a soul,
The watermen too, the watermen too.
For the scamps got dead drunk the day of the poll,
And not one voted blue, not one voted blue.

The lawyers, oh dear, they swindled him quite,
As they only can, as they only can.
He got off at last, robbed, plundered outright,
But a far wiser man, a far wiser man.

